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a time for joy

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A TIME FOR LEARNING, A TIME FOR JOY

THE EARLY YEARS

A Sourcebook for Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2

Original by Betty Gibson, M.Ed., LL.D. (Brandon), 1979
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INTRODUCTION

The success of Early Childhood: A Time for Learning, A Time for Joy encouraged the Early Years Program Review Committee to request that Manitoba Education undertake a revision of this valuable sourcebook to update and expand it to include grades one and two. The original document, developed primarily as a guide for kindergarten teachers, was written and compiled by Dr. Betty Gibson, one of Manitoba's leading educators with extensive experience in preparing teachers of young children.

Essentially the sourcebook, retitled Early Years: A Time for Learning, A Time for Joy, does not replace current Manitoba Education curriculum guides; rather, it supplements them by presenting a balance between the theory and practice of early years education. The emphasis of this sourcebook is on models of organization and methods of teaching to guide teachers in helping all children develop happily, at their own rates. To this end, the document provides information about the characteristics and needs of children throughout their early years, outlines the nature of the learning process, and makes suggestions for programs and materials to meet the needs of young children at various stages of development.

This sourcebook should be of value to all Manitoba's early years educators, particularly those teachers of children whose ages range between five and nine years. At the same time, the new looseleaf format should allow for the easy inclusion of new ideas and knowledge as they are gained, to keep the document current.

This sourcebook was developed to reflect the Goals of Learning as defined by Manitoba Education in its Administrative Handbook and as outlined below.

"1.00 THE GOALS OF LEARNING

1.01 The Nature of Goals

Goals are statements of what students are expected to accomplish or work towards and are of special importance for the school system because they:

(a) provide direction and structure for the detailed development, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum in all areas and provide the basis from which specific objectives for the various subjects, courses, and grades are developed;

(b) provide for the parents and the community at large a basic understanding of objectives that the schools are trying to achieve; and

(c) identify the particular responsibilities assigned to the schools in relation to those of the various other agencies involved in the education of young people.

The development of goals, along with the concomitant priorities and actions, is a shared responsibility involving (a) the province, which identifies general objectives applicable to all and additional objectives related to particular, provincial policies; (b) the school board, which refines the provincial objectives to apply more closely to its own local needs; and (c) the school, which builds its specific curriculum plans based upon both. Through this process also, local school and community needs contribute to the priorities established at the divisional and provincial levels.

1.02 Learning Goals for Young People Ages 5 to 18

Education is a continuing, lifelong process which encompasses all of the learning experiences that result from the interaction between the individual and the physical and social environment; the school is a formal institution that has the more restricted purpose of providing certain planned learning activities for young people over a limited period of time. Thus the school, albeit very important, is only one of a number of societal agencies involved in the educational process, and takes its place alongside the home, the church, and the community in playing a significant role in the lives of young people.

The school, as part of the total educational process, accepts particular responsibility for certain specific goals that are key to the broader goals of education, which in turn are perceived as a responsibility shared with the community as a whole. The following goals statement incorporates both categorizations--the more limited, exclusive commitment as well as the shared tasks--and provides direction for the design of a curriculum to meet a wide range of social expectations. Included are statements stressing the development of the student's skills in communication, mathematics, science and the arts. The goals reflect the interrelatedness of broad aspects of the curriculum in promoting the student's growth and development, both as an individual and as a responsible citizen. The student's increasing capacity for critical thinking and decision making is a major focus.

Schools should provide students with those experiences which encourage them to develop to their fullest potential--mentally, physically, morally, emotionally, culturally, and socially. In the process of identifying the major goals of a system dedicated to this task, it is reasonable to begin by describing those skills which a student is expected to develop. However, while certain goals may receive varying emphasis at different times, all are of equal importance over the 12 years of public school education and relate closely to and reinforce each other.

Through the school program, the student should demonstrate an increasing ability to:

1. Listen with sensitivity and discrimination;
2. Articulate ideas, thoughts, and feelings with confidence and lucidity;
3. Read with an increasing comprehension of the deeper levels of meaning;
4. Write about experiences, thoughts, and feelings with increasing clarity and sensitivity;
5. Develop an awareness of, and a sensitive response to, literature;
6. Use mathematical concepts and arithmetic operations with understanding;
7. Use measurement in relevant situations with an understanding of the concepts involved;
8. Understand relationships involving space and shape, and develop judgement related to distance, time, force, speed and direction;
9. Understand the changing environment, in terms of its parts and of the patterns that characterize it as a whole;
10. Develop creative and imaginative thinking;
11. Express and communicate with confidence through play, song, dance, creative movement, drama, visual arts, and other means;
12. Develop aural awareness and a sensitive response to music;
13. Develop visual and tactile awareness and a sensitive response to the visual arts;
14. Make informed and rational decisions. This capacity includes increasing ability in the skills of inquiry, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. These skills involve:
    - 14.1 gathering and organizing specific factual information--observing events, measuring properties and rates of change, and classifying events, objects, and ideas;
    - 14.2 assessing information communicated by all forms of expression:
        - (a) distinguishing between fact and fiction; primary and secondary sources; correlations and causation; direct statement and implied meaning;
        - (b) recognizing bias and prejudice;

(c) making systematic comparisons;

14.3 forming and defending an opinion by using a system of logical inquiry;

15. Develop a basic understanding of his/her physical and emotional nature by:

    15.1 recognizing and responding effectively to his/her individual strengths and weaknesses within the context of an expanding range of interest, skills, and abilities;

    15.2 demonstrating an acceptance and understanding of bodily changes and the shifting of social relationships and emotional adjustments associated with the onset of puberty;

    15.3 developing habits which contribute to independent problem solving and responsible behaviour;

    15.4 developing positive ways of dealing with peer group influence, institutional pressure, and bias and prejudice;

16. Exhibit habits of safe and responsible behaviour toward self and others;

17. Exhibit habits which promote lifelong physical fitness, good nutrition, continuing physical activity, and positive use of leisure time;

18. Develop an understanding of social relationships, and interact effectively with others by:

    18.1 recognizing the interdependence of all people--people in specialized roles and people in the various roles which the individual plays as a family member, student, worker, and citizen;

    18.2 examining and considering responsible lifestyle choices related to work, society, and family within the context of his/her personal interests, capacities, and values;

19. Develop knowledge of and reasoned pride in community and in Canada, and an understanding and empathy for social and cultural groups different from one's own;

20. Make decisions based on a personal value system which recognizes both the priorities of his/her society and the integrity of the individual;

21. Make the transition from school to employment and/or post-secondary education by:

21.1 assessing personal interests, values, and capacities related to work and education;

21.2 understanding the dynamics of group behaviour in a work situation;

21.3 knowing that prerequisite competencies are needed for a wide range of occupations and educational programs;

21.4 knowing the available resources for secondary and post-secondary education and/or preparation for work;

21.5 having a basic knowledge of new and existing technology;

21.6 assessing a variety of projected changes of a social, technical, and economic nature that may affect patterns in education and work;

21.7 developing the primary knowledge and basic skills needed to enter a chosen area of post-secondary education and/or a chosen area of initial employment.

20. Develop the primary knowledge and basic skills needed to enter a chosen area of post-secondary education and/or a chosen area of initial employment.

"4.00 EARLY AND MIDDLE YEARS K-9

Learning goals cannot exist in isolation, and the WHAT that is to be learned cannot be separated from the WHY, WHEN, WHERE, and HOW. Manitoba Education, therefore, regards the environment for learning to be equally as important as the objectives to be attained. Sections 5.01 and 5.02 seek to describe the larger learning context that Manitoba Education believes schools and school divisions should seek to develop in the Early and Middle Years.

4.01 Early Years

The term, early yers, designates that stage of children's development which begins as they emerge from a state of total dependence on family and home and become involved with a much larger world, including many children of their own age group, and continues through to pre-adolescence.

In the early years the school curriculum provides the opportunity for children to acquire those fundamental skills essential for their continuing education and the knowledge and attitudes necessary for self-development and participation in the wider society. Learning, however, cannot exist apart from the environment created for it. An environment that recognizes the rights and needs of others and stresses trust and respect for the individual enables the child to grow in self-confidence, self-discipline, self-direction, cooperation, independence, and responsibility.

A major responsibility of the school, therefore, is the development and maintenance of a learning environment that fosters the child's creativity, motivation, and confidence, as reflected in the child's increasing ability to:

1. Cooperate responsibly with peers and adults;

2. Demonstrate independence while respecting the rights and feelings of others;

3. Accept errors as a natural part of the learning process;

4. Demonstrate self-discipline in relationships with others and in the performance of tasks;

5. Derive a feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction from the school experience;

6. Search for and recognize beauty and value in human relationships and in the natural and man-made environment;

7. Demonstrate an acceptance and understanding of bodily changes and the shifting social relationships and emotional adjustments associated with the onset of puberty;

8. Cope responsibly and comfortably with change and related stress.

Similarly, learning strategies and activities selected should seek to:

1. Diversify the activities of the child to provide for development from all points of view--intellectual, emotional, social, physical, and moral;

2. Encourage each child to view learning as a process of continuing search and individual discovery;

3. Use real experience or simulations to build and extend the child's experiences;

4. Relate physical, recreational, play, and work activities to the learning goals of the student;

5. Encourage an integration of learning goals;

6. Respond to the learning characteristics of all children by recognizing:

6.1 the wide range of abilities (from the very limited to the gifted/talented);

6.2 the needs of those children with unique or special needs."

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CHAPTER ONE

CONTEMPORARY EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

I. SHIFTING POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

Over the past half-century, the goals and methods of early years education have changed to reflect our evolving awareness of the physical, psychological, and social development which takes place during childhood. Different aspects of this process were emphasized at different times, consistent with the particular pedagogical and social values in vogue. In the Twenties, for example, play was considered to be the child's natural occupation, necessary for physical and psychological growth; nurseries and kindergartens, therefore, existed primarily for socialization. Children were left largely on their own with time, space and materials for experimentation. The teacher encouraged self-motivation and self-help and provided suggestions for physical, mental and sensory activities.

During the Thirties and Forties, new insights into personality development illustrated the importance of allowing children to express their emotions freely. While play still remained the most important activity for the child, it also became the vehicle through which this emotional growth could be stimulated. Teachers were cautioned to be on the alert for signs of distress, fear, or frustration and to help children deal with these feelings. The need for children to be dependently secure before they could be independently secure was recognized.

In the Fifties and Sixties, the emphasis changed as more became known about the development of intelligence. Teachers adjusted their programs to give added attention to language and conceptual growth. Emphasis on sensory and motor development was retained.

Today, the emphasis in early years programs is on integrated activities which meet the needs of individual children and help them to gain a sense of identity through satisfying interaction with peers. Both direct and indirect teaching methods are used. It is generally accepted that until a child's confidence to explore and to focus effort have been developed, the sensitive teacher will need to plan activities to guide children to challenging but achievable goals within a flexible environment. The immature child can then comfortably attempt tasks that might otherwise cause stress. While encouraging skills in self-expression and simple decision making, modern early years programs also recognize the need for children to develop the self-control and respect for others. Such programs are modelled on home environments which are both nurturing and stimulating.

Learning Center

Early years educational programs of the future should increasingly provide opportunities for children to make choices, to express themselves in words and actions, and to learn to trust and respect themselves and others. All this can be accomplished through a rich and active play life. There is no better foundation for a lifetime of learning.

II. GROWTH OF INTELLIGENCE IN THE EARLY YEARS

While acknowledging that heredity may set widely varying limitations on children's potential for intellectual growth, writers in this field emphasize the crucial importance of the environment of the early years. Some researchers say that children develop fifty percent of their intelligence by age four and that a further thirty percent develops over the next ten years. A stimulating environment should give children opportunities to develop oral and aural language abilities, to think creatively, to organize their thoughts, to question freely, to develop auditory and visual perception and memory, to develop fine and gross motor skills, to enjoy art experiences using many and varied materials, to engage in singing and rhythmic activities, to develop self-awareness, and to play happily with others.

In such an environment, children may show a readiness for reading, writing, and dealing with the concepts of number and space during their fifth year or even earlier. At age six, most children are anxious to read and write. However, even at this age, not all children will necessarily be ready for all of these activities. Children will begin to have a desire to read only if personal experiences with reading and written expression have been relevant and comfortable.

III. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE: THE NEED FOR A POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Children entering school today have had experiences which vary greatly from those of their parents or grandparents at a similar age. Many factors have an influence on the development of each child. The teacher must be aware of these changing social elements as well as be informed about each child's situation. This knowledge will foster acceptance of various experiences and life styles and will be reflected in the programming.

Most children have had experiences with television. They have picked up much incidental knowledge. They may have memorized many words but not necessarily the concepts that match them. They sometimes appear ready for higher level thought processes than they are actually able to handle. Also, children may appear to be able to operate modern household appliances, but they may neither recognize the dangers inherent in handling such machines nor have the judgement to determine how and when they should be used. For these reasons, parents and teachers must remain observant, alert, and ready to provide the appropriate amount of guidance to young children throughout their development.

It may have been correct a generation ago to assume that entry into school was the child's first experience away from home, however, this is not the case for most children today. Many children have attended playgroups, nursery school and/or a day care prior to kindergarten. In many cases, more of the kindergarten pupil's waking time may well be spent at one of these places than at school or at home. Thus, the teacher has the added responsibility of becoming familiar with these, or any other person, group, or agency that may be of great importance to the child, in order to become partners in his or her development.

Although many family lifestyles in the Eighties may be untraditional, all children--whether they live in a two-parent family, in an extended family unit, in a single-parent home, in a shared custody situation, in a foster home or other type of family unit--want and need to share their feelings and experiences. It is important for the teacher to know the children well and to be supportive and accepting towards all. Phrases such as "take this home" should replace "take this to Mommy and Daddy" to avoid children's feeling of discomfort or of being left out. Genuine interest on the part of the teacher will foster love and understanding in the classroom between teacher and students as well as amongst students.

IV. CULTURE: BUILDING ON TRADITION

One's culture is reflected not only in clothing, food, or music but in one's total way of life. This total way of life affects most things one does: friendship, physical contact, preferences, ambition, thoughts, perspective on the world as a whole. Language and/or religion are usually an integral part of the culture.

Two aspects of culture must be considered by the teacher. One is the enhancement of the child's own culture and his or her identity within that culture. The second is the fostering of positive attitudes and acceptance of cultural groups other than the students' own.

In some situations, most of the children in a classroom or school may belong to a minority cultural group. Certain programs are set up for that very purpose such as the Ukrainian Heritage Language Program, amongst many others. Enabling the child to grow in his culture will be facilitated if the teacher is also of that culture. For the teacher who is not, it is very important to become familiar with it and to be open-minded about all its possible forms of expression.

In an increasingly multicultural society, however, the school or class will likely be composed of children whose cultures, lifestyles, and economic backgrounds differ widely. Generally, children accept differences in race and colour with a mild curiosity and without fear or resentment unless this has been learned from adults. However, helping a widely differing set of individuals to become part of a comfortable group requires skill on the part of the adult. It often also involves an initial period of adjustment. All children need to be allowed to respect and retain features of their own culture so that they continue to feel comfortable with their own family life. At the same time, they may have to learn some of the social skills of the dominant culture. Teachers must accept the responsibility for recognizing features of differing cultures and for reflecting a respect for each child's home. Intolerance is often prompted by fear, and fear is usually the result of ignorance. Ignorance can be dealt with in school. When differences in clothing seem to set a new child apart, teachers can help by arranging for all the children to see and handle examples of clothes of other cultures. Little children feel very elegant wearing saris for the first time in a "dress-up" situation. The same thing can happen when they don other ethnic costumes. Providing samples

of foods is another exciting way to introduce children to other cultures. However, children should be given the option of tasting or not.

Cultural fairs and folkloramas provide opportunities for children to recognize that "being different" does not mean "being inferior." Playing games that are part of the Native child's heritage and learning to enjoy the folk dances and songs from other countries will encourage acceptance and understanding. Children in minority cultures need to be aware of interesting people from their own cultures. Whenever possible, therefore, contributions made to Canada by various cultures should be pointed out. Whenever possible, teachers should invite people from a minority culture to interact with students. Classroom visitors might include parents, sports and arts personalities and community helpers.

Inviting children to share their experiences and ideas in an atmosphere of trust and acceptance will allow them to develop self-confidence in their own identity as well as prevent the development of prejudice and bigotry in others.

Cross-cultural experiences can be enriching for all.

No child should have to endure the pain and indignity of being rejected because he or she is different. It is enough that children from other cultures may have to face language problems! While the child is absorbing the sound of the new language and picking up more from peers than can be taught formally, attention should be given to helping that child surmount the psychological and social problems which, if not solved, can lead to chronic anxiety, feelings of inferiority, frustration and bitterness that may interfere with learning. The teacher's acceptance of minority groups in the classroom can ease the trauma of adjustment for those children who have been separated from the environments they knew and understood and who have been placed in situations where much of what they experience does not make sense to them. Remembering that love and caring are understood and appreciated by all cultures, the teacher who possesses these traits will do much to foster self-confidence and understanding in all children.

The Multicultural Resource Centre at Manitoba Education can provide further information to the teacher who wishes to enhance his/her knowledge of cross-cultural education.

V. THE YOUNG CHILD'S NEED FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Present day lifestyles seem to deprive growing children of enough of the physical activities which are so essential to them. Children who live in apartments or congested areas of cities may have few safe and interesting places and opportunities for play; urban environments often lack areas where really active play is possible. Many children travel to school by bus or car and spend long periods watching television or are involved in other passive activities. It is essential that early years classrooms provide opportunities, equipment and space for both free play and organized physical activity. This will assist children in developing basic movement skills necessary for successful participation in future physical education programs. In addition, it is generally agreed that some degree of physical activity is necessary to promote optimal growth and development.

VI. SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD

1. Since free play is one of the best agents for learning, much of the time should be allotted for the children's unstructured, self-organized play. Parents and schools should provide the materials, the time, the space, and the companions so that play is a natural part of every child's day.

2. The maturing child requires increasing amounts of guided cognitive learning. Play activities contribute to the child's expanding sensory perceptions which form the basis for cognitive growth.

3. Guiding a child in interpersonal relations is an important part of early years education. This guidance can be integrated into both organized and free-play activities. Schools should retain a strong affective emphasis.

4. Communities can provide support to parents in strengthening home-related features of the child's development. Parents may seek help in the areas of nutrition, prenatal and postnatal care, diagnosis of learning-related problems, sensory and verbal stimulation and language development.

5. Parents should be encouraged to become involved in early years programs so that they can reinforce good learning habits encouraged at school and help the teacher to understand what they consider important for their particular child.

6. Early years education should foster and build on the child's natural curiosity and provide opportunity for choices among a range of experiences appropriate to the learner's age and stage of development. Adults can learn about the child by observing behaviour.

   The knowledge explosion has forced a re-assessment of what should be taught. One cannot predict what particular knowledge is going to be of future value to the child, and no person can retain more than a small fraction of the information available. The emphasis in the schools, then, must shift from the retention of facts to the development of the thinking process. Competent thinking skills form a solid basis for the self-motivation needed in continued learning.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE NATURE OF THE LEARNING PROCESS IN THE EARLY YEARS

I. FOSTERING INTELLECTUAL GROWTH

Learning is an active process which begins at birth and progresses as the child matures and responds to the environment. Reasoning, abstracting, interpreting, and integrating are highly sophisticated intellectual processes. Learning begins with sensations, which, upon reaching the central nervous system, become interpreted and gain meanings. The child's ability to react to and interpret sensations provides clues to his or her perceptual ability. Sensations are perceived as being alike in some respects and different in others: when likenesses can be recognized in things otherwise different ("four-leggedness" of many animals), and differences can be recognized in things otherwise the same (cows are not exactly the same as horses), the child is able to form concepts. At first concepts are vague and often incorrectly formed. If they are to become sharpened and integrated, they require the organizing and reorganizing which goes on all through life.

Piaget calls the processes by which concepts are changed assimilation and accommodation. The child fits knowledge into a cognitive structure which is already formed (assimilation) and changes a structure to make it possible to include new knowledge (accommodation). These processes are the bases for learning throughout life. Until perceptual ability is well-developed, the child cannot internalize new elements in the environment. Until the brain is able to organize and reorganize the messages it receives, the child cannot make use of the perceptions which the sense organs may provide.

Growth in perception and in the organization of cognitive structures depends on developmental processes. The early years should, therefore, be a time of rapid growth in the formation of both precepts and concepts, since future learning will be built on the structures developed in the first seven years. Piaget's classification of the stages of learning is presented in chart form on the following page.

AGE RANGE	STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS
Birth-2 years	Sensori-Motor	• The child's actions are based on immediate sensory experiences.
2-7 years	Preoperational	• The child's actions are becoming internalized. • The child can now represent an object with a word or image. • Symbolic play begins. • The child does not understand rules.
7-11 years	Concrete Operational	• The child can distinguish between play and reality. • The child has an understanding of rules (i.e., plays games with rules). • Thinking is limited to past concrete experiences and not ideas.
11-15 years	Formal Operational	• The child thinks about abstract ideas. • The child can now discuss philosophy, religion, etc. • The child can conceive of ideals.[1]

NOTE: There may be some variance in the ages and stages, but they are sequential.

In the preoperational stage, which corresponds to the early years of schooling, learning takes place most successfully when the child is engaged in exchanges and discussions with children or adults and when the child is actively involved in the manipulation of concrete materials. Piaget is certain that this type of learning is far more important to cognitive development than is the learning which comes only through language, although language learning and concrete learning can be mutually supportive.

The kinesthetic-proprioceptive senses--those that respond to stimuli generated by the position and movement of the parts of the body with respect to other parts--must function fully if the child is to be aware of his or her musculo-skeletal position in space. This sensitivity is necessary to the development of muscular coordination and all automatic activities such as walking. A child's learning at this stage is dependent on the degree to which the senses function. In the pre-operational stage, the child should have many experiences, especially in play situations, which require the use of the five senses. He or she needs stimulation from many sources while learning to organize and utilize information. Multi-sensory teaching is based on the recognition of this need.

Programs for children between the ages of three and nine must therefore include activities designed to teach the child to organize perceptions such as the following:

- the use of language and the development of vocabulary needed for classifying,
- classification/categorization exercises,
- games that require recognition of differences,
- association games,
- perceptual-motor activities,
- role playing (the child learns to adapt language to varying situations),
- physical activities, particularly those that develop kinesthetic-proprioceptive sense, e.g., position in space, direction,
- balance, eye-hand coordination,
- activities that require patterning and sequencing.

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In addition, the learning environment must provide children with:

- opportunities for selection of activities,
- materials for self-initiated activities,
- a variety of experiences both within and outside the classroom,
- opportunities to enhance feelings of self-worth.

II. NURTURING AFFECTIVE AND SOCIAL GROWTH

The early years are also critical ones for affective growth. Children's social competence and emotional patterns develop and stabilize early in life. At this age, the child is learning how to deal with emotions, how to react to others, and how to cope with needs and demands of family and playmates. Along with developing social capacities comes a growing awareness of the body and of his or her personality. The child must have the help and guidance of good models in order to develop a positive self regard, to become aware of the accepted rules of social behaviour and to become genuinely interested in other people and respectful of their rights. Children learn by observation, by trial and error and by assessing the reaction of others to their behaviour.

Personality can be adjusted most easily before a child reaches middle childhood. In the early years the child can learn to be reflective rather than impulsive. If helped to feel adequate, the child will probably be happy, will persevere and meet challenges with an outlook that says, "I think I can deal with most unpleasant situations." If the child feels inadequate and unaccepted, he or she may react to difficulties by completely withdrawing or gaining attention by some form of unacceptable behaviour.

mirror on the Wall
the fairest of them all?

During this period, the child should:

- learn to respect differences among people;
- learn how to play and get along with others;
- learn to share time, materials, and the affection of others;
- learn to cope with disappointments;
- learn to develop realistic expectations for self and others;
- learn to accept personal limitations;
- learn to evaluate self and others realistically.

Stimulating Affective Growth

There are many ways to stimulate affective growth.

- Situations that the child is not yet able to handle should be avoided. Exposure to threatening or emotionally charged situations should be kept to a minimum while the child is learning to control his or her own emotions and behaviour. An adult can reduce stress in a social situation by removing a toy that triggers rivalry and reintroducing it when a rule for its use has been established.

  Growth will only take place when there is a reasonable match between what the child encounters and what he or she can cope with emotionally. If not wisely handled, a child in a tantrum may learn nothing except how to become the centre of interest and to get his or her own way.

- Adult support and the child's freedom to choose should be balanced. If there are no behaviour boundaries, the child experiences stress and confusion; if unrealistic demands are made, the child experiences anxiety. An adult who reassures and sensitively handles control will develop independence in a child as long as the child has some opportunity to experiment and make choices within the framework provided. However, children often try to redefine limits by overstepping them; this is a legitimate learning process.

- It is not realistic to expect adult standards of morality from the young child whose ideas of right and wrong are not integrated and may often be contradictory. The child will model his or her behaviour in terms of what the people important to that child approve and reward. If the teacher and parents have diametrically opposed value systems, the child may be forced to develop two ways of behaving, one for home and one for school.

- Adults should be prepared to discuss problems with a child but must also be aware that detailed adult explanations may be inappropriate for the very young. As the child approaches the middle years and begins to build a personal value system, an internally integrated morality develops. At this point, discussions and explanations can be a great help to the child who is in the process of confirming or establishing values. The child should be helped in examining possible choices and in considering consequences. Role playing is one effective technique by which this can be done.

- Basic needs must be met in a consistent, satisfying manner. Poorly fed, exhausted, apprehensive children cannot learn or trust others. Physical needs often take precedence over social, emotional and academic needs.

- All harsh emotional punishment should be avoided. If punishment is inconsistent and highly emotional, the child becomes anxious and develops a low self-esteem. Under these conditions a child will risk or initiate very little. Children cannot cope effectively with adults who make random and unpredictable demands on them.

- Adult behaviour must be consistent with the values being espoused. The teacher and parents must demonstrate consideration for others, acceptance of individual differences, fairness and concern, before they can expect children to act in a similar manner. Adults should be genuinely warm and accepting of children. Adults should listen to their questions and protests and help them to visualize what it is like "to walk in the other person's shoes." Role playing contributes to understanding the other person's point of view.

- Language is the vehicle of social interaction and language development is essential to emotional growth. Children need the vocabulary necessary to express their concerns and to make sense of their experiences. Those who cannot express themselves verbally will physically act out their needs and frustrations.

> Childhood does not connote passivity. Children are spontaneous actors, differentiators, assimilators, and accommodators. They are constantly discovering, learning, and are doing this more quickly and efficiently than they will at any other stage of their lives.
>
> \- Leo Buscaglia
> Personhood

FOOTNOTES

[1] Adapted from Ed Labinowicz, The Piaget Primer (Menlo Park, CA: Addison Wesley, 1980), p. 60.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE NATURE OF THE CHILD

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THREE- TO NINE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

This sourcebook is concerned mainly with children as they emerge from a state of total dependence on family and home to become involved with a much larger world which includes many children of their own age group. The new relationship to this extended peer group, as well as to adults outside the family sphere, will influence and possibly threaten the child's self-concept. The child needs to feel accepted in this new community while continuing to retain that sense of personal worth which should have been developed in an accepting home environment. Learning flourishes when the individual is respected; a confident sense of self is basic to the motivation to achieve. To gain that self-confidence, the child needs adult support and reassurance about his or her ability to continue to learn and to achieve.

Maturation and Environment

For many years, growth was assumed to be an orderly unfolding of maturational stages. As a result, limited attention was given to the interaction between the child and the learning environment. Piaget has pointed out, however, that such interaction is the most critical factor in determining the rate of intellectual growth and levels of achievement. The environment must be especially rich and challenging as the child moves through the predominantly sensori-motor and pre-operational period of the preschool years. In the primary school years, the child needs to manipulate concrete materials while developing logical thinking processes. These thinking processes are necessary for the more symbolic thinking which the child will be expected to handle in early adolescence. The child's own growth pattern, the quality of adult guidance and care received, and individual affective maturity will all influence the chronological age at which that child progresses from one learning stage to another. Movement from one developmental level to another is natural and cannot be hurried; therefore, adults should not attempt to accelerate children's intellectual development but should endeavour to facilitate the natural process.

II. MATURATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

THE THREE-, FOUR- AND FIVE-YEAR-OLD

The Three-Year-Old Child

This is a stage of equilibrium where children are eager to learn. At this stage, children usually feel good about themselves because they have learned the basics of language and can communicate and also because they can walk and are able to move independently of others. Success in these two vital areas may have provided a sense of accomplishment which makes children more ready to conform and to try to please others.

The three-year-old begins to develop a capacity to share, to take turns, and to wait for needs and desires to be satisfied. However, the child still craves to be the centre of his or her little world, and parents continue to be the focus of the child's life. This may be a period of amazing growth in language ability as imagination continues to develop. The child probably tells "stories" and invents imaginary playmates who are safe to be with since they can be ordered about, scolded, and blamed. The child begins to move out of parallel play into cooperative play, but may often revert to playing beside, rather than with, others.

At this stage, the child has a decided preference for large muscle movements and a real resistance to using fine muscles which are not fully developed. In this stage large toys, blocks, and puzzles are appropriate. The child will take objects apart but have difficulty putting them together again. He or she will play in the sandbox and on the climbing apparatus for fairly long periods. Tricycles, wagons and large balls are necessary to this kind of play. The child perceives colour but has a limited understanding of shape and form.

Behaviour problems at this stage usually occur when the three-year-old is rejected by the less conforming four- and five-year olds. Parents often worry about the approach-avoidance behaviour which is characteristic of this age. Children seem ready and eager to take part in activities with others and then suddenly decide not to do so; they want certain toys and then quickly toss them aside. These children must be given time to try out relationships. They are also getting to know and appreciate their bodies. Because they fear and resent the loss of any part of the body, they resist having their hair and toenails cut.

They try out facial effects and like to observe them in mirrors, but they still resent playmates who make faces at them!

Tactile sensations are important at this stage; children want to touch and handle everything they see, sometimes with disastrous results. Highly valued objects and irreplaceable treasures should be placed out of reach while children are learning that touching is not always acceptable.

The Four- and Five-Year-Old

This is a period of change and insecurity. The child is growing rapidly and may have lost the good motor coordination which is typical of most three-year-olds. The child will regain this coordination, however, through activity.

The four-year-old stage is also a period of emotional extremes. This has been called the "out of bounds" stage. Friendship with peers is very important. However, since four-year-olds are boisterous and are not able to understand rules, they are apt to get into fights and cry or whine because they cannot cope with themselves and others. Other children's feelings and rights are not considered because the preoperative child is not able to see anybody's point of view other than his or her own. The child knows what is "mine" but is apt to think that everything that can be grasped is also "mine."

Although the concept of sharing cannot be understood until the age of six or seven, the four- and five-year-old can be helped to "let go" of a favourite toy if it is clearly marked with the child's name.

This is a period of marked language growth; the four-year-old uses full sentences, has a sharp ear for sounds, can make up rhymes, and enjoys interesting and silly words. This is a time for learning nursery rhymes, poems, and songs. The four- and five-year-old may enjoy shocking adults, and swearing is one certain way to accomplish this. Because the child at this stage cannot differentiate fact from fiction, adults must be careful not to label his or her stories lies.

The four-year-old thrives on variety and demands changes of pace but also needs firmness and control; isolation for short periods often helps the child to calm down. Parents may despair because the child forgets the politeness and social manners once displayed. Moods shift easily, the child enjoys mischief and can become a "show off."

It is a time of sibling rivalry and power struggles because this child demands leadership roles and feels a need for self-assertion. Though the child may still comply with adult demands, he or she often does so unwillingly and may act aggressively toward younger siblings. Though usually protective and loving toward younger children, the four-year-old may use them as scapegoats.

THE FIVE- AND SIX-YEAR-OLD

This is the age at which most children enter kindergarten and is once again a stage of equilibrium. The five-year-old is not so likely to be in conflict with him- or herself or with the environment. Usually the child has solved many problems related to motor control, exhibits an economy of motor movement, and can attempt many more complicated tasks. The child has more poise and muscular skill, but fine muscle coordination is often weak, and the eyes may not yet be ready for prolonged close-up work or very fine visual discrimination. Children who spend long hours watching television or who grow up in homes where free play is not possible, often show a developmental lag with respect to fine muscle coordination.

Socially the five-year-old is usually self-sufficient enough to be able to reach out to peers. If a child is unable to attend kindergarten, the parents should seek out situations where he or she can play with children of a similar age. Parents are still the pivot of their child's world, but as long as they are there, the child will venture out into unfamiliar situations for short periods. The five-year-old seeks approval from adults and, to a lesser extent, from peers and is, on the whole, quite cooperative. Now, however, the child is able to assess personal chances of success in tasks and may resist attempting them if they seem too difficult.

The five-year-old is becoming more obedient and is more willing to accept the rules that are necessary for group living. For the most part, he or she is willing to observe conventions, to be polite, and to ask permission. The child also questions rules, however, and should be told why particular regulations add to the quality of life for all. Children at this stage require explanations in order to rationally comprehend the consequences of their own anti-social behaviour. They only understand rules for specific situations and cannot transfer a rule to another, different situation.

Toward the end of this stage, the child begins to worry about not being acceptable to peers. Children at this age are also likely to develop anxieties about dying and about the death of loved ones.

The child is capable of a great deal intellectually and should receive much stimulation at this stage. The five-year-old is very curious and enthusiastic about learning and begins to find security in establishing a routine, in finishing tasks, and in solving problems.

This child learns best in a free play situation where there is some choice of activity and the child can take on some responsibility for directing his or her own learning.

Some five-year-olds may demonstrate a desire to learn to read and to write stories. This natural development should be recognized by those who are planning the child's activities. The five-year-old uses language quite skillfully, being able to handle most grammatical constructions including longer and more complex sentences, clauses of condition, and idiomatic expressions. Guidance is needed for the child who uses language as a form of aggression.

Five-year-olds are often concerned with cause and effect but frequently reach different conclusions since their thinking is different from that of adults.

The task of the parent and the teacher is to be sensitive to the right moment for a particular learning.

THE SIX-, SEVEN- AND EIGHT-YEAR-OLD

The development that takes place in this period is probably the most significant in the child's school life. He or she still wants assurance that parents and other adults are available when needed, but becomes increasingly anxious to be accepted by friends.

Physical growth usually progresses at an even pace which the child can accommodate with a high degree of coordination. Personality traits are fairly well established, and there will probably not be any dramatic changes from this point until the onset of adolescence. The child is now seen by others as a unique individual rather than as a "child going through a particular stage."

Memory improves dramatically at this age and auditory discrimination reaches a peak. This is a good time to develop listening skills! Thought processes become much more organized. Expressions of feeling may not be so overt since the child is aware that some thoughts and actions are best hidden from adults. She or he will develop patterns of behaviour for the playground, for the home, and for the classroom.

The grade one and two classrooms should not mark such a radical departure from the kindergarten or home environment that the child builds a poor self-image and loses confidence. It is essential that the child's coordination skills, motor abilities, and independence in self-care be recognized and appreciated by both the parents and the teacher. (Children often see the teacher as a surrogate parent.) Expecting children to read and write before they are ready or to sit still and keep quiet for long periods may elicit feelings of guilt and inadequacy. If the teacher's evaluation of the child is based on intellectual skills, the child's own motivation for school tasks may be lost.

For all children, drama, art, movement, and play are vital parts of their lives. The joy and satisfaction found in these areas help to develop a fulfilled child.

THE EIGHT- AND NINE-YEAR-OLD

This is a period when parents are apt to over-organize their children's free time by registering them for all sorts of activities. When this occurs, much creative potential is stifled.

Children are now approaching the stage described by Piaget as the "concrete operations stage" and are vitally interested in classifying and becoming collectors of things such as shells, hockey cards, match covers, etc. Their ability to think logically is developing, but children will argue illogically at times, if only to test their evolving skills.

DISCOKID
DISCOKID
DISCOKID

Eight- to nine-year-olds want to assure themselves of a close circle of friends and expect to have a "best friend." If they cannot make and keep friends, they will probably feel inadequate and may seek recognition in socially unacceptable ways to get the attention of both adults and peers. Swaggering and flippancy are tolerated by friends of this age. Toward the end of this period, admitting a liking for school may become as unacceptable as any admission that one can tolerate the opposite sex.

This is an age for asserting independence from adults. However, as the child sheds the security of adult control, he or she has doubts and anxieties which may be masked by aggressiveness and bravado. At this point the child seeks new models to replace those that have been rejected. A slightly older brother and sister, cousin or friend often serves as a new model.

Adults must expect that the tender feelings of the child whose models are shifting might be reflected in bursts of temper and tantrums and/or periods of regression and conflict.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CURRICULUM AND INTEGRATION

I. CONSIDERATIONS WHEN USING CURRICULUM GUIDES

The early years education program must consider the whole child, by recognizing her or his intellectual, emotional, physical, and social needs. Within this context consideration must be given to the child's cultural and ethnic background. Thus, the curriculum is planned to facilitate the child's natural development and accommodate the child as an ACTIVE LEARNER.

The curriculum guides of Manitoba Education are excellent sources of the concepts and activities necessary for an early years program. The time allotments assigned to each of these curricula are guidelines and must be considered as such. However, the concepts and content areas must not be lost in the process of using an integrated approach to implementing the curricula. It is not always possible to integrate a number of different subject areas and concepts into every theme.

This chapter offers a view of the various curricula and an integrated unit model for the early years classroom. An important consideration in the planning of these integrated units is the cultural or ethnic background of the students. A teacher may not realize the impact a child's background may have on his or her behaviour in the classroom. The following example illustrates a potential misunderstanding:

> As part of an integrated unit on "nutrition," the teacher is presenting a lesson on the classification of various foods into their groups (fruits and vegetables, meat and equivalents, milk group, bread and cereals, and extras). She is well prepared. Based on her knowledge of how children learn, she has included various audio-visual aids and several concrete props in an effort to motivate the children and enhance participation. In general, she has succeeded, for most of the children are clustered around her table are volunteering answers to her questions and participating enthusiastically in the discussion. Most are able to complete the follow-up classification activities successfully, and some even go beyond what was required by ... working on a related creative activity.
>
> But one little boy, a recent newcomer to Canada from the West Indies, doesn't respond as enthusiastically as the teacher had hoped this afternoon. He stands at the back of the group, his eyes looking down a great deal of the time. He does not volunteer answers or participate in the discussion; and when called upon, he mumbles so that the teacher

> asks him to repeat himself and the other children either giggle or look perplexed. He doesn't seem to know what to do during activity time; and after some encouragement, those activities he does attempt are done either incompletely or incorrectly. The teacher interprets his behaviour as shy, withdrawn, possibly even delayed or slow; and since this is the usual pattern in other parts of the program, she will likely report her perceptions to his parents for remedial help, ESL/D classes, special education, or whatever special programs are available in her board, or simply continue to face the daily frustration of trying to "get through" to the child and "bring him out" while working with approximately thirty other children ...
>
> [However,] the child's reluctance to participate in discussion was not due to slowness or shyness (except possibly for embarrassment because of his dialect and other children's reactions), and his problem with the latter tasks was certainly not caused by lack of ability or motivation. The fact is that without any previous experience with these foods so common to all the other children, the higher order classification tasks were beyond his conceptual understanding. How different and exciting it would have been for him had the teacher included a mango that none of the other children could identify, and how interesting and exciting might it have been for the other children if a plantain had been included so he could have corrected them when they called it a 'big banana.'[1]

II. LANGUAGE ARTS

Traditionally, language arts in the early years has focussed on reading. There is now recognition that reading, writing, speaking and listening are equally important in a good language arts program. Children learn by doing. They learn to talk by talking, to read by reading and to write by writing. Opportunities for children to do all of these at various developmental levels in all early years classrooms must be provided. The English Language Arts: Early Years (K-4) (1984) curriculum guide has excellent chapters on reading, writing, speaking, listening, and developmental spelling. Parents will need help in understanding uncorrected writing, developmental spelling as well as other aspects of the language arts curriculum. (Note sample letters for parents in Chapter Seven.) Language arts can be integrated into other areas as opposed to integrating content areas into language arts. For example, strands of the language arts program might be integrated into the health curriculum.

Early Reading: There is no Rush!

"The earlier the better" is becoming a prevalent philosophy of many parents. Infants and very young children are being scheduled into music, swimming and gym programs whether or not they are developmentally ready. This pressure extends to the nursery and kindergarten in the form of systematic reading instruction. However, many excellent teachers and a number of researchers involved in the study of reading say it is not desirable to provide any form of systematic reading instruction at this level. Certainly, it is possible to teach some four- or five-year-olds to read. The question remains, however, whether this is the most valuable use of a child's time. It is possible that real harm could result if reading instruction is begun before a child is ready.

Most educators of young children agree that no child should be put under any pressure to learn to read. Children who are not developmentally ready for reading, whether at age four or eight, cannot succeed at the task. An unhappy beginning has an inhibiting effect on later attempts to learn. However, some children reach the "right" moment to begin reading at five years of age or earlier. Should this moment be disregarded because "teaching reading is not considered to be a kindergarten task"? Certainly no "teachable moment" should deliberately be passed by.

The teacher of an early years program must emphasize oral language development. With a good oral language base, children will begin to read on their own WHEN THEY ARE READY. In this way reading is handled without pressure and is learned through games, language experience charts and activities chosen by and for themselves.

- Reading is a process whereby people use signs to gain meaning from their world.
- Reading is interpreting signs and labels, faces, tones of voices and rain clouds.
- Reading for meaning begins with understanding the WHOLE before breaking it into PARTS.
- Reading begins naturally between the ages of four and eight.

At no time should the child be directed away from an interest in reading. If the child chooses reading-related activities, the teacher can be certain that the child is physiologically and psychologically ready and that no harm is being done. The understanding teacher will provide the materials, the quiet corner, the opportunity to read to others and will let the child feel good about his or her accomplishment. Note that all children are reading, but at a variety of stages. Some children will be reading signs and logos while others will be reading print in books. Provisions should be made for all the children.

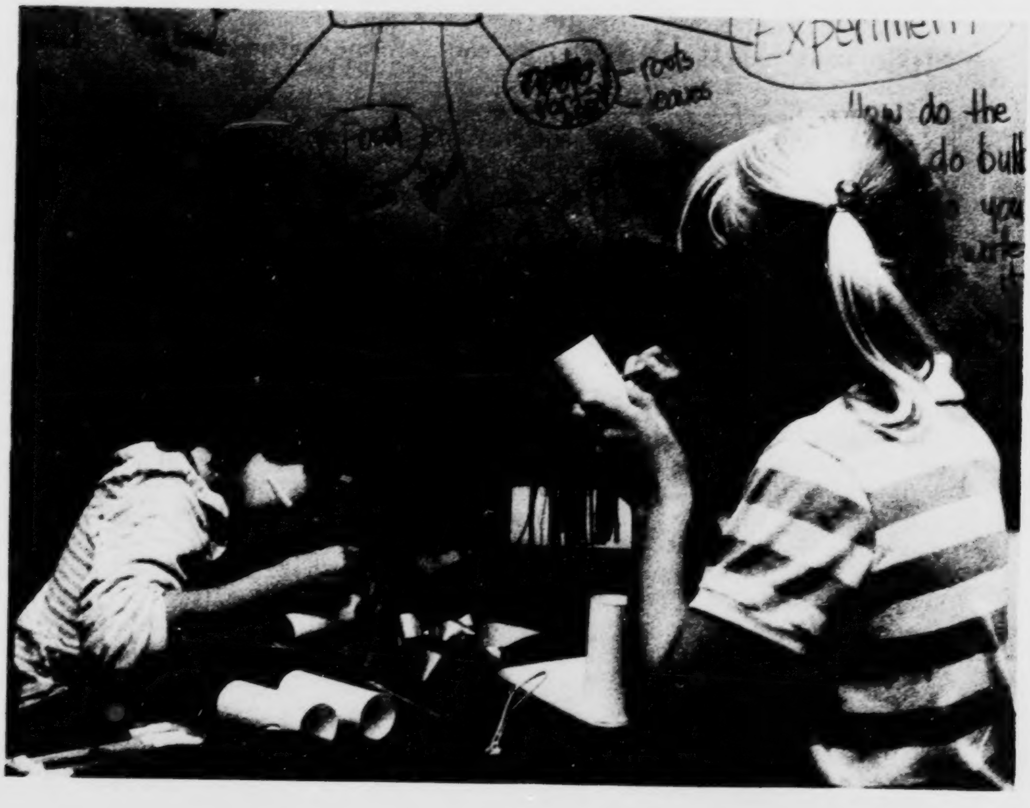
The child who learns to read the printed work early will read in what is usually the best way, using a combination of sight, context, phonetic, and structural clues to extract the meaning. Young children who want to read and are ready to do so should be given help when they request it. This procedure is safe and quite different from that of introducing all children to formal reading.

Socialization, language and cognitive development are the main components of early years programs. Language development continues throughout life, but the foundations are laid in the early years. Language, an important life skill, is also the most important element in readiness for reading.

> To want to learn is far more important than being taught. Worthwhile learning takes place only when the student is comfortable enough to process and integrate the information to which he or she is being exposed.

Writing: A Developmental Process

All young children believe they can write. Their first written representations will usually be drawing. These representations are for the child's own interpretation rather than for communication. As the child develops, the written form eventually becomes a tool for communicating with others.



During the writing process the young child will use much oral language. This oral language will help the child rehearse what he or she is intending to write. As well, it will help the child with the sounding out of beginnings and endings of words and the re-reading of what he or she has already written.

The teacher can help the child see the value of the printed word as a way to:

- send messages home,
- extend birthday invitations,
- list shopping items,
- label classroom items or organization,
- record songs and poems,
- follow recipes,
- communicate with an absent audience (i.e., penpals).

See Donald H. Graves, Writing: Teachers and Children at Work. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.

Story-Telling

Story-telling is an opportunity for the young child to be involved in the offerings of good literature. Children's literature and adults' literature share the same objectives: to share the feelings and experiences of others in order to better understand oneself and to extend one's knowledge beyond personal experience.

Children respond readily to the listening experience involved in story-telling. It is not difficult for children to be aurally attentive to an exciting, humourous, or touching story relevant to their world.

Through listening to varied types of stories the child increases vocabulary, not only in using words correctly and understanding others' use of them, but in gaining a sense of the nuances of words and their allusive qualities. The child also discovers that it is not just what he says, but how he says it that is important.

One of story-telling's greatest values is the building of a happy relationship between teacher and children. There is no book to introduce, the teacher speaks directly to the group, with eyes moving from one child to another, and includes the children in the situation with a gesture, a nod, a smile, a frown.

Selection of Stories

The following are criteria for the selection of stories.

- Stories must be suitable for the age of the listeners and should be interesting, attractive and meaningful to them.
- Length is important. The attention span of most children is short, and their physical needs are toward movement. They cannot be still for long without discomfort.
- Continued stories are not desirable for the nursery or kindergarten child. For some children it is difficult to revive the previous day's impact or to carry over a mood. Stories requiring "continued" treatment are, ordinarily, best left for older children.
- Some stories cannot be told without adaptation. In adapting stories, the narrator must first analyze the story to select the essentials.
- Stories which contain plenty of conversation and action with a minimum of description are desirable.
- Certainly easily identifiable types of stories appeal to young children such as:
  - stories about animals,
  - stories in which machines and toys are personified,
  - stories that present everyday situations,
  - stories with rhyme, repetition, exaggeration,
  - traditional folk and nursery tales.

The development of the story will follow the pattern of:

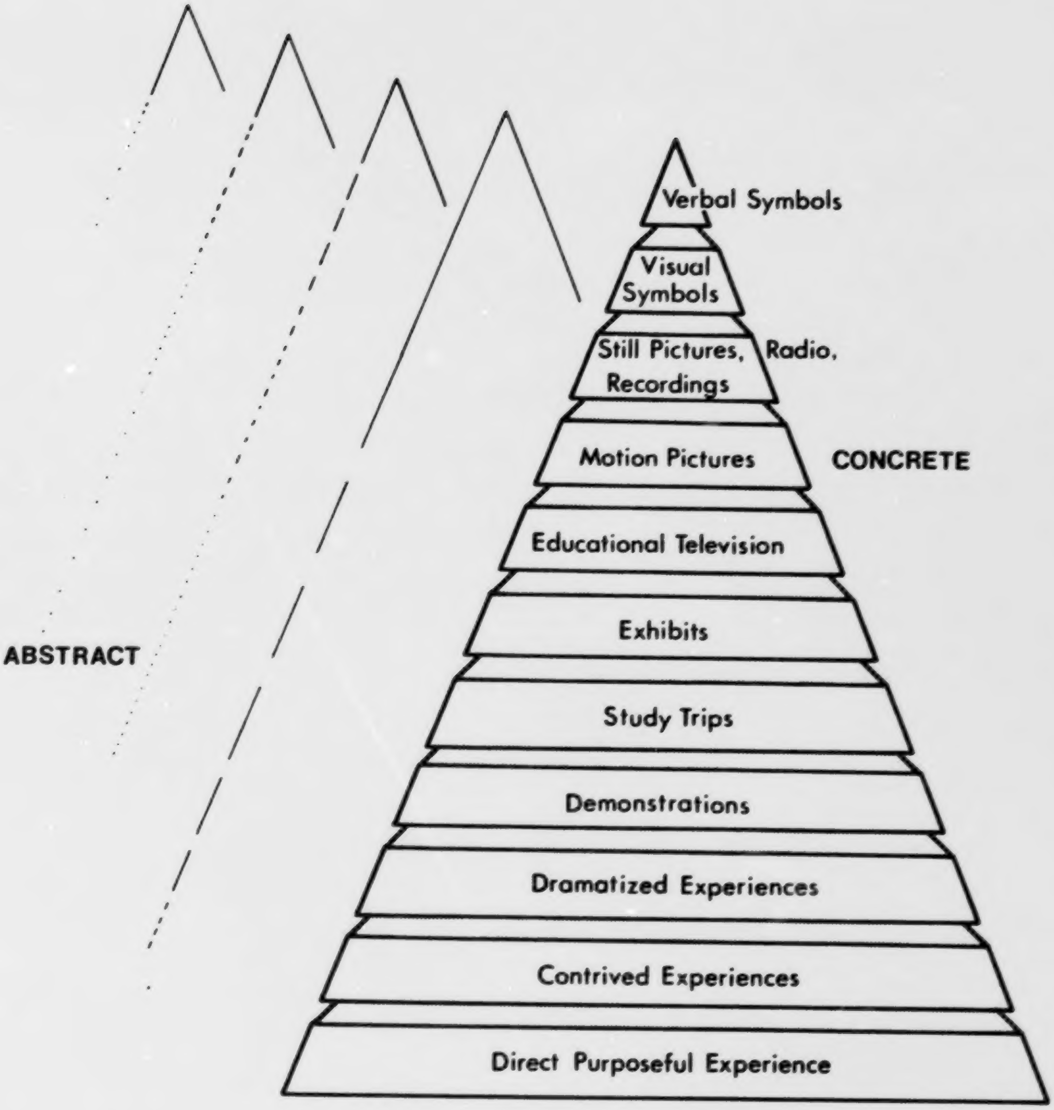
- a presentation of the situation to be resolved, the problem to be solved;
- a description of events, the happenings leading to the solution of the problem;
- a presentation of the climax, the point at which the problem is settled;
- the presentation of the conclusion which follows the climax swiftly. It is a brief and definite statement of the favourable outcome.

Children love to story-tell too! There is an excellent section in the English Language Arts: Early Years guide on children's story-telling.

Drama

The word, drama, comes from the Greek work dramos which means "to do!"

In the early years, doing is the basis of learning. Dramatization is one of the foundations of how children learn. Drama is not a "frill" but rather a mode of learning. Dale's Cone of Experience is used to illustrate.


Verbal Symbols
Visual Symbols
Still Pictures, Radio, Recordings
Motion Pictures
CONCRETE
Educational Television
Exhibits
ABSTRACT
Study Trips
Demonstrations
Dramatized Experiences
Contrived Experiences
Direct Purposeful Experience

DALE'S CONE OF EXPERIENCE

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How to Begin

- Begin teaching drama where you feel most comfortable. But do begin.
- Choose activities that are compatible with your own teaching style.
  Consider:
  - space
  - time
  - class size
  - control
- Select from available materials:
  - children's ideas
  - themes
  - stories
  - nursery rhymes
  - songs, other music
  - poems

Drama can take several forms in the early years classroom.

1. Drama Learning Centre

   Drama can take place in a learning centre where props are set up to create different environments. A restaurant, a grocery store or a home are some examples. Props can simply be empty cartons, large boxes, menus, dress-up clothes, or dishes. (See Chapter Five, Dramatic Play Centre.) A dress-up box should be available right through the elementary grades. Research indicates that children who were provided with theme-related play materials increased substantially the amount of imaginative play in which they engaged.

2. Creative Movement

   People communicate through body language. Children can benefit from this form of expression. In addition to moving to rhythm and music, students enjoy movement to stories and poems. Sample activities:

   - At each drum beat or other signal:
     walk
     - like yourself
     - in slow motion
     - fast
     - as if you were tiny
     - as if you were tired ... etc.

now walk
- through mud
- through hot sand
- through ankle deep water
- through marshmallows
- through a haunted house
end in a cool, grassy meadow.

. Moving to poetry, for instance Mary Britton Miller's "Cat" in A Time for Poetry (May Hill Arbuthnot, ed.).

. Moving to one word suggestions (language extension).

- In one place, make your body

wiggle	totter	lurch	sway
squirm	swing	tumble	squint

- From place to place, make your body

creep	saunter	stalk	amble
stroll	meander	plod	sprint

3. Journeys of Imagination

Imagination exercises are among the easiest of the dramatic techniques to utilize in the classroom. In imagination exercises the teacher guides the students in creating situations, characters, settings and emotions "in their heads." The images the students create will assist them in creative writing and reading, as well as in general concentration and attentiveness.

This exercise may be used for relaxation as well:

. if possible, darken room;
. have students put their heads down on their desks or lie on the floor not too close together; have them close their eyes;
. suggest images that are progressive, starting with an image which is close to the student's own life experience. For instance, have them imagine that they are invisible and have just entered their own homes. What does it look like? What is happening inside as you walk through the rooms?
. present one image at a time;
. use your own daydreaming process as a mode;
. don't rush it! make it fun! enjoy yourself too!

III. MATHEMATICS

The mathematics curriculum was developed to provide a balance between an understanding of what mathematics is and the development of sound mathematical skills. There is strong emphasis on language development, concrete experiences, maintenance and reinforcement of skills including drill, problem solving, mental arithmetic, and estimation, and also upon continuous evaluation.

Children at preoperational and concrete stages of development learn by actively manipulating their environment. Therefore, they need many objects and materials to explore.

> A page of abstract symbols, no matter how carefully designed or simplified, because of its very nature, cannot involve the child's senses the way real materials can. Symbols are not the concept; they are only a representation of the concept, and as such are abstractions describing something which is not visible to the child. Real materials, on the other hand, can be manipulated to illustrate the concept concretely and can be experienced visually by the child.
>
> \- Math Their Way[4]

Thinking Skills

Children should have many informal opportunities to sort objects, to arrange them in categories and to discuss their activities with interested adults. As children mature, they can more readily handle structured exercises in classification. Such exercises contribute to concept formation and develop logical thinking. The teacher can use a large file of alphabetically arranged pictures, collections of small objects and a box of shapes of various sizes and colours. The attribute blocks, differing the dimensions of thickness, shape, size, and colour are useful here, too. Children's original "reasons for grouping" should be accepted in a positive way.

Manitoba's K-6 Mathematics (1978) curriculum guide and the Problem Solving Handbook K-2 Mathematics (1983) provide many activities to use in the early years classroom.

IV. SCIENCE

In the daily integrated program, teachers will find opportunities to encourage the natural curiosity which children have about the physical world. They can help children understand basic, but powerful ideas in science using the everyday materials brought into the classroom. Children enjoy bringing things to share with others!

The fundamental concepts of science can be discussed with children at their level. The first grasp of an idea may be a tentative one, but as the child grows older, he or she can build on these basic ideas to construct progressively more complex forms. The child's understanding will be deepened through experience.

Do not be afraid to give straight forward scientific answers to children's questions.

Wherever possible, the child should be helped to see order in nature, to see cause and effect relationships, and to explore the principles of gravity, conservation of energy and matter. Children are more concerned about specific objects rather than about general principles. Concrete experiences should be provided until they are ready for generalizations. It is never too early to make the child aware of the interdependency of humankind and the natural environment and the obligation to conserve the environment for future generations.

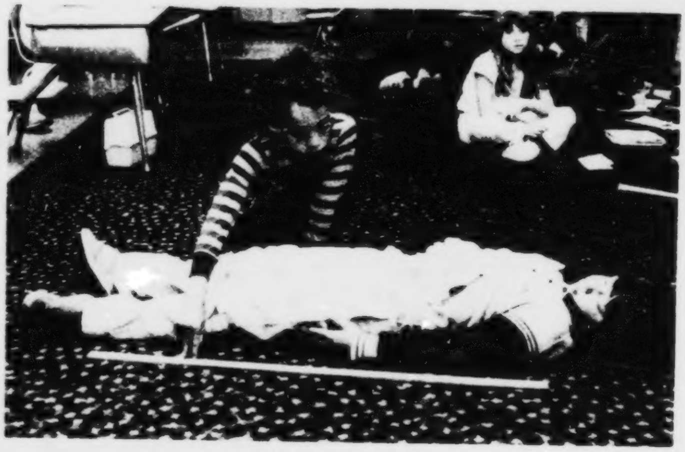
Teachers should encourage the children to:

- observe,
- offer their own theories about cause and effect,
- predict outcomes,
- make and test generalizations,
- look at reference books provided by the teacher and librarian,
- handle natural objects and simple tools.

The K-6 Science (1978) curriculum guide provides a wide variety of concepts and activities for teachers to use in the early years.

Young children learn best when information is given in response to their own questions.

V. SOCIAL STUDIES



Social studies lends itself well to integration. Many of the topics and core concepts can form the basis of an integrated unit with other content areas, especially the language arts. The program is planned to correspond with the stages of development of the young child.

The physical environment, the social environment and the concept of self are recurring themes throughout the early years.

Self-concept will often determine a child's success. Children should learn to understand about themselves, beginning with their immediate physical and social environments. They should learn to feel comfortable with themselves, their school and their neighbourhood. The early years are a time for rapid change in the child's development. Teachers should emphasize the changes that do occur in the community, family, and in the children themselves. What are the causes and effects of past and present changes and how might these changes affect the future?

Human beings are interdependent. In a world of increasing technological development, our dependence upon others is becoming more apparent. The children will learn that they have needs and wants which are dependent upon both their physical and social environments. These needs and wants will be met in a variety of ways.

In developing social studies themes, decide first what concept should be learned. The social studies guides for individual grades (K-2) outline the major concepts and specific objectives and provide a variety of activities.

VI. PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The Importance of Physical Activity

Physical activity and sport hold a high status in our culture. Witness the attention devoted to the topic in the media. Children are influenced by this and often attempt to mimic their heroes. Students also value and admire good physical performance among their peers and often, as a result, strive to emulate them. Physical education programs attempt to put sport into proper perspective. Children have an uninhibited love for physical play and activity. In fact, physical activity is a major part of a young child's growth and development.

Research from several disciplines supports and encourages regular and appropriate physical activity for all, especially young children. Exercise stimulates optimum growth and development which is the basis for health and fitness both now and in the future. Children who are physically active are usually outgoing, integrate and socialize easily and are able to cope with new situations. Physical activity offers children the opportunity to develop strong peer, teacher, leader, volunteer, parent and coach relationships.

Success in physical activity contributes to a child's self image and self-confidence. Through movement children become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and come to accept them. Participation in physical activity allows children the opportunity to become more efficient users of their bodies. It should provide them with the chance to experience the satisfaction of movement for its own sake. During their early years, children continue to have their psychomotor, affective and cognitive behaviour enhanced through a variety of experiences. Physical activity has the unique potential of positively influencing all of this behaviour.

The acquisition and refinement of gross motor skills dominate the physical play of early childhood. These motor skills are in fact the building blocks on which more refined and purposeful movement is based. All sports and physical activities are related to these early motor skills and are a variation, adaptation, combination or extension of them.

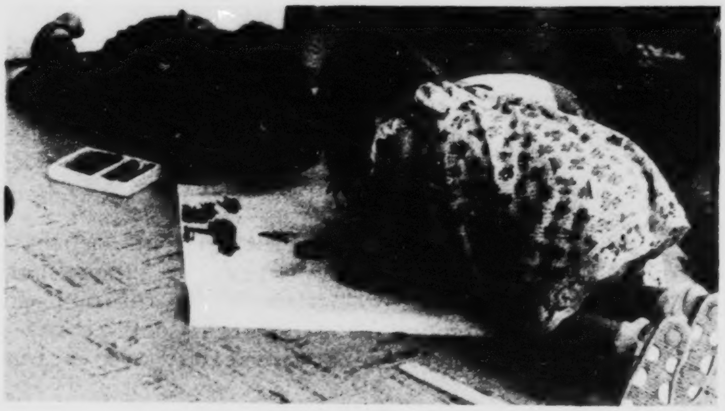
Programming

The K-12 Physical Education (1981) curriculum guide details the specifics of physical activity programs for all students in the public school system from kindergarten on. With respect to the early years child, the guide offers specific suggestions as to time allotment, lesson planning, class organization, evaluation and specific activity suggestions. Early years children should have the space, time, equipment and opportunity to participate in a variety of appropriate and progressive large muscle activities in order to develop basic motor or gross motor skills as described in Chapter Five.

Activities should require simple directions and be of a short duration with frequent changes and repetition. Maximum participation should be stressed. Gross motor skills may be developed, refined, and enhanced through participation in simple games, gymnastics, and rhythm/dance activities. Different sized balls, bean bags, balloons, hoops, ropes, mats, benches, and climbing units are a few of the recommended items of equipment.

VII. ART

A sound art program should be at the core of every early years curriculum. Such a program has the potential of greatly increasing the child's visual awareness and visual discrimination skills. It can also assist the child in his or her attempts to interact with the environment and give the child another means of expressing thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and observations. To assure that these things happen, however, teachers must take a careful look at the goals of art education and at present practices (or traditionally accepted art activities), and where necessary, design a program which makes closer links between practice and theory.



Young children tend not to be terribly concerned with the final product. For them, the value of artistic expression lies in the process. Often, they won't remember from one day to the next which painting is theirs. What they do remember is the experience of painting--the colours running together or the slap of the wet brush on the paper. They will remember the feel of clay or the line drawn with a marker. Teachers who guide their students through the process, therefore, can help them expand a range of possibilities and discover things they might not learn on their own. A teacher who asks, "What would happen if we wet the paper before we put the paint on it?" or "What happened when the red and blue paint ran together?" helps children expand their frames of reference and grow at their own rates, without undue emphasis on a perfect end product. If such a product becomes the goal of the art lesson, then the teacher essentially has to make all of the decisions to prevent "mistakes." Thus, the teacher who is product oriented denies children the most important part of the art-making

Following an extensive study of nursery and kindergarten programs to discover which learning environments best fostered creativity in children, Lambert Brittain, who worked for a number of years with Lowenfeld, concluded:

> Preplanned art activities often have a good deal of the teacher's thinking imbedded in them, making it difficult to tell how much of a project is the child's.[3]

Other researchers in art education have echoed this view more forcefully:

> If the objects made ... do not make a unique contribution to the child's aesthetic development, they have no place in the curriculum. If they are cut from an adult - conceived pattern, if they are poured in a commercially made mold, if they are copied and assembled from a prototype, they are nonart and have no place in the child's life. Using art materials does not necessarily mean that the child is having an art experience.[4]

Of equal concern, however, is the program which takes a totally "hands-off" approach. The teacher who says to the students, "there's the paint, do whatever you like," is not acting as a guide for further learning. It is the teacher's job to help children make sense of the world by encouraging them to observe, question, experiment, and organize. Teachers must help children develop skills in producing and understanding visual communication so that they can express the things they want to express. Skills in using media in drawing, painting, sculpting and in looking at art can be taught and should not be left to chance or "talent" any more than they are in any other subject area. Again, the object is not to turn out perfect end products, but to use art as a means of exploring the environment--as a means of seeing, expressing and learning.

Stages of Creative Development

Children in the early years go through various stages of creative development. As in other areas of learning, the child cannot be "rushed" into the next stage. There is much evidence to suggest that many of the exercises given children to develop greater fine-motor control, hand-eye coordination or manual dexterity do not make a great deal of difference. In fact, the child who does progress in these areas is felt to have done so as a result of maturation and would thus have progressed equally well without the exercises. In other words, teachers can't rush maturation: yet in many classrooms, children are still copying or tracing, colouring within the lines or filling out endless purple sheets which seem to be little else but "busy work." Visual discrimination can best be encouraged by guiding children through "seeing" exercises which help them to notice shapes and sizes and textures. Teachers can help children to use this visual information in their drawings and to develop the vocabulary necessary to describe their experiences. Such terms as rough/smooth, hard/soft, light/dark, geometric/organic, regular/irregular should gradually become a part of children's vocabularies and concept formation.

At each stage of development, the teacher should be prepared to intervene to maximize cognitive growth and to recognize the learning that is taking place. A five-year-old should not have his or her drawings judged by the same criteria as that of a ten-year-old, but should, through the years, show definite signs of development. The stages of development in art described in Brittain's book Creativity, Art and the Young Child[5] are as follows:

1. Random Scribbling

   The child's first experience with drawing appears as soon as the child is able to hold a crayon or pencil and discovers that it makes a mark.

2. Controlled Scribbling

   At this stage, which usually occurs well before the child enters school, there is a conscious effort to control the drawing material, although the results may still look random.

3. Naming of Scribbles

   Often, by the time a child is four years old, there will be some attempt to put a story to the marks usually as a result of adults asking "What is it?" The marks, however, may bear little resemblance to the story.

4. Early Representation

   At about four years of age, the child makes the important discovery that the previously random marks look similar to something in the outside world. It is at this point that the child begins to make a conscious attempt to represent, although in a very general way (i.e., a circle with 2 dots and a line is a person).

5. Preschematic

   By the age of five, the child has begun to develop symbols for everyday things--person, tree, house, etc. These symbols are unique to the child and gradually change and become more sophisticated as the child learns to process and record more visual information. It is important that the child be encouraged to develop individualized symbols based on observation, rather than to copy formulas devised by the teacher or taken from a program on "how to draw."

6. Schematic

Most children in the early years are in the schematic stage of development. Again, teacher intervention should help the child experiment with media and design concepts, develop several visual possibilities around a theme, look at works of art with an emphasis on what is happening, and determine what effects are produced by colour, line, shape and texture. The child should become generally more proficient at understanding art and producing expressions of his or her view of the world. Many children do not get past the schematic stage and, indeed, the majority of adults draw at a level not unlike that of the average eight-year-old. This is not because of a lack of "talent" or manipulative skills, but because the content of art, like that of any other subject area, must be taught. Most adults grew up in a system in which art was "taught" through the "hands off" approach, or through direction of the wrong kind, such as determining the end result, rather than directing the processes and encouraging expression and indidivual problem solving.

> Where exciting, colorful, successful and dynamic elementary art programs and practices exist, the classroom art teacher or the special art teacher is on the job--guiding, challenging, directing, stimulating, questioning, suggesting, approving, prompting, planning, coaching, advising and organizing. In other words, teaching.[6]
>
> Frank Wachowiak, Emphasis Art

Suggested Program

A suggested program for early years art is outlined in the revised K-6 Art (1984) curriculum guide. Activities include various forms of printmaking, sculpture, drawing, painting, collage, fibre arts activities and photography. Equal emphasis is placed on art appreciation, visual awareness and art production. Most lessons start with looking at visuals, then identifying elements such as line or colour in the environment and, finally, using the new concepts learned in producing art. Students are encouraged to make their own ideas and interpretations part of the art experience.

VIII. MUSIC

For young children, an early introduction to music provides a beginning to a life-long enjoyment of the art and an awareness of his or her own culture and other cultures. It is important that children ENJOY and take an ACTIVE part in music experiences, that they become explorers in the world of music. Improvisation, guided and stimulated by the teacher, is central to the program. Passive listening activities, rehearsals of shows or songs and memorization of symbols are inappropriate music activities for young children.

Making Music

Children should learn at least twenty to thirty songs or singing games. They learn by doing and moving. Sing (or play a tape or record if you are not confident) and the children will join in more each time. Sing loudly, softly, happily, sadly, etc. They can occasionally even sing silently (just mouthing the words).

Children love to make up their own songs. Encourage this by modelling. For example, sing "We're going out to recess soon." Develop song making by singing songs where children can make up verses to tunes such as "Skip to My Lou" or "Down By the Bay."

Children also love to play percussion instruments in accompaniment to the piano, guitar, tape or record. Let them move and play, while changes are made to the tempo, volume, etc. The instrument can be made with elastic bands, string, containers and wood.

Developing Rhythm

To develop children's ability to feel the beat or steady pulse:

- use familiar rhymes, simple nursery songs, or recorded music and let the children think up ways to emphasize beat with many motions, e.g., walk and say the rhyme, stamp and say it, clap, tap, swing, bend knees, slap thighs, nod head, etc.

- change the speed, from faster to slower, and repeat the various movements in another class time. Be careful not to make the tempo of a song too fast. This only overstimulates the children so that they cannot think about what they are doing.

To develop an understanding of the concept of fast and slow (tempo):

Develop the ability to clap the rhythm pattern, i.e., to sing the words and syllables with hands. Rhythm patterns are taken from rhymes and songs. Later in the year combine beat (steady pulse) and rhythm pattern.

Listening Actively

The goal is to have the children learn to listen actively to music. Have them:

- recognize and move or dance to simple and complicated rhythms--walk, gallop, run, march, rock, skip, and jump. In other words, do what the music tells you to do.
- be aware of the difference between loud and soft, light and heavy, high and low, happy and sad, quiet and lively, jagged and smooth.
- recognize moods in music.
- interpret music through movement and dramatization.
- correlate the listening with the song material, story-telling, nature or science lessons, seasonal activities.
- write stories or poems suggested by the music.
- listen to sounds in the environment and think of words to describe the sound, i.e., long, short, bright, fuzzy, squeaky, wooden, rough.

Integrating with Other Content Areas

Art

- Make sound-producing instruments under the following categories:

  - instruments you strike,
  - instruments you shake,
  - instruments you blow,
  - instruments you pluck.

- Play descriptive music and have children respond by drawing or painting their impressions.

Drama

- Use free response to music--each child dons a hat from a pile of hats and takes on a new personality. Children move to the music as their new personality would move.
- Dramatize a story the music tells.
- Experiment with vocal sounds to express emotions, e.g., anger, joy, sadness, surprise, etc.

Social Studies

- Use music, either a song or recorded music, to reinforce a lesson, or to introduce a unit or part of the overall lesson plan.

Multicultural Activities

- Use music or rhythms of different cultural groups.
- Invite people to the classroom to play their instruments. Allow children to touch, smell, blow, strum.
- Discuss these musical visits.

Above all, make music fun!

IX. THE COMPUTER IN AN EARLY YEARS ENVIRONMENT

A good early years program incorporates equipment that supports the concepts of children's interaction with their environment and with each other through exploration, discovery and play. The sand table, the water table, the large blocks, the play house, the store and the variety of other centres are integral parts of the learning process in an early years program, so why not the computer?

In the environment of many children today, it is apparent that a large percentage are interacting with computer technology before they ever enter a classroom, whether it be in the toys available to them at home, or at the library, at the grocery store, at the bank or at McDonalds! Many of them within the next few years will have access to a computer in their homes. In actuality, many young children take to the technology as readily as they take to the television and tape recorder.

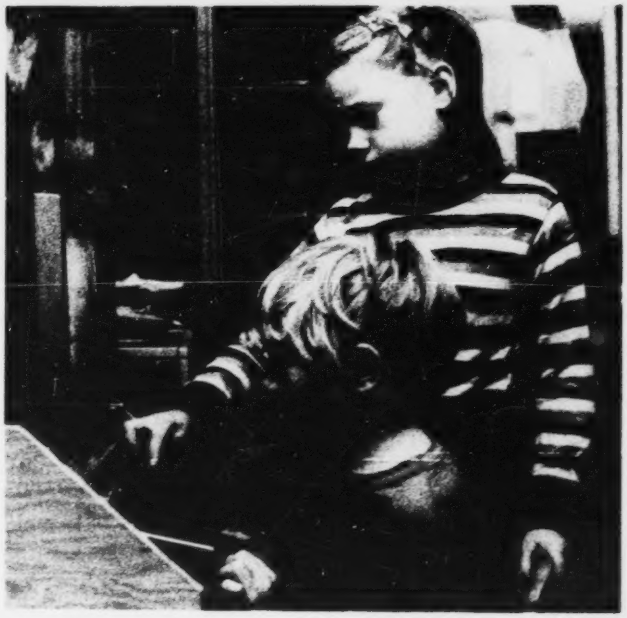
How should this technology be integrated practically into an early years classroom? As with any other piece of equipment, its use will depend on the attitudes, imagination, and organization of the teacher.

When incorporating an activity into a program, every teacher must assess several factors. First, educators must consider whether the activity will provide the most appropriate and most effective avenue for meeting the objectives that have been outlined. From the perspective of an early years philosophy then, it must be asked, does the use of the computer foster interaction between children and with the general environment? Does it encourage exploration and discovery? Will the activity enhance or augment another segment of the established program? Can the computer be used to extend or to expand on the conceptual development already occurring at the crafts centre or at the block centre, or at any of the other activity centres? Through observation it must be determined how children respond to the activity. If the equipment and the activities incorporating the equipment are of value, then educators can work out the logistics of implementation.

When assessing the use of the computer in this frame of reference, teachers must recognize that there are two dimensions to consider: the machine itself and the available software. The machine on its own offers very little to young children, other than giving them a visual response to their pressing on the keys. It is definitely not suitable to teach programming in BASIC to young children, so obviously software is the area that must be examined. Here again, as in choosing any resource to be used within the classroom, the teacher must make some pedagogical choices. The software presented to the children must reflect the goals and objectives of an early years program and afford a dimension of learning consistent with the concepts of exploration, discovery and play. This being the case, most software should be avoided. Drill and practice software is highly inappropriate in the early years classroom. Tutorial programs which teach a particular concept and then evaluate the child's understanding of that concept would, as well, have little place in an early years environment.

Children should always work in pairs at the computer.

What, then, is appropriate? There are some marvellous pieces of software that would readily, if used creatively, enhance the early years philosophy within a classroom. EZ Logo has been specifically designed to be used with young children and is based on Piagetian learning theory. The use of the Tasmanian Turtle (a Robot-like device controlled through use of the computer) extends the screen image of the three dimensional form with which the children can move and create. Logo helps to develop concepts of problem solving, shapes, sequence and patterns. It has been referred to as "low threshold, high ceiling." This means that children can begin with Logo at any point in their learning and go as far as they can with the concepts which evolve on a building block principle. In terms of affective development, Logo creates a wonderful opportunity for children to work and play together in exploring designs, in problem solving, and in discovering the dimensions of the very simple, but potentially sophisticated, Logo language. The most important guideline when selecting computer software is that the child have control over the computer and that the software not be a glorified worksheet.



play together in exploring designs, in problem solving, and in discovering the dimensions of the very simple, but potentially sophisticated, Logo language. The most important guideline when selecting computer software is that the child have control over the computer and that the software not be a glorified worksheet.

The creative possibilities of the computer can also be expanded by the addition of such peripherals or attachments as a joystick, mouse, Koala Pad or graphics tablet. Using devices other than the keyboard gives the child the opportunity to create through a very different medium from what is available at the crafts centre. Children pick up what initially seems to be the complex process of using the menu on the Koala Pad very quickly, and because they are so uninhibited they can make marvellous creations. When children reach the stage of becoming interested in the product as well as the process (around grade two) these creations can be "dumped out" on a printer to make such unique and personal items as T-shirts, decals and calendars.

> The computer, indeed, does simulate many experiences that the child could have with concrete materials. The thing to remember is that the computer is not designed to eliminate these experiences but to offer new avenues of learning and to afford the child another medium in which to explore and create.

X. HEALTH EDUCATION

Children begin to develop their health-styles at a very early age. The family provides its members with a framework for healthful living. This framework is extended by the school through a variety of learning activities that assist the student in bridging the gap between knowledge, attitudes and positive health practices. If health promotion were encouraged to spread from home to school and into the community by various means such as health education, the benefits derived might become proportionally greater than the efforts involved. The school can be viewed as a social organization that reinforces quality of living through the teaching of health education programs in a positive lifestyle approach.

School health includes the instructional program, the coordinated efforts of health professionals within school settings and the establishment of a safe and comfortable learning environment. The teacher's role of providing an optimal teaching-learning environment for the delivery of health instruction is complimented by observing and monitoring the child's health status. A healthy child, one who is physically, socially, emotionally and intellectually healthy, is capable of optimal learning. An ill child is not. The role of the teacher in referring children who may be in ill health to the appropriate health professionals and the family is an important aspect of a school health program.

The philosophical base of the K-9 health education curriculum of Manitoba Education is to motivate children and youth to increase health knowledge, to develop positive attitudes toward healthy living and to practice health behaviour that is conducive to promoting optimal health for a lifetime. Concepts, principles and skills introduced in the early years are developed through concrete and simple means and build toward more complex interrelated understanding and skills as the child progresses through the curriculum. Growth and development, enhancing self-concept, applying decision making and values to health problems, and practicing positive health habits are four themes reflected throughout the curriculum.

A variety of support materials for the health education curriculum are available.

1. No student textbook is required for the K-4 program, but teachers are encouraged to have one or more health texts for their personal background and a sample of student materials. The Manitoba Text Book Bureau Catalogue lists suggested teacher references and texts, as well as student texts.

2. Teaching Aids for each grade are available for the first unit of the curriculum; others are in preparation. Each grade level package contains a limited number of critical learning materials for students, including teaching methods and ideas. These serve as a model for starting a collection of resources for each unit.

3. A Resource Listing consisting of films, topic-related books, kits, display materials, pamphlets, in-services and primary resource material is being compiled to accompany the curriculum.

4. Sets of The Health Education Methods for Elementary School Teachers are available in two formats: a slide-tape presentation or print material that deals with general health education content for teachers, including nutrition, safety, body systems and physical fitness, chronic disease, environmental health, dental health, mental health, drugs and human sexuality.

5. Several workshops are available through Manitoba Education, Manitoba Health, and specific health agencies to provide orientation to the curriculum, and indepth information on selected topics.

The curriculum support materials that complement the program can assist the teacher in doing well the job of promoting the optimal health of Canadian children.

XI. INTEGRATION

In the planning of an integrated program, it is necessary to understand what is meant by integration. Many teachers struggle with this concept because the term "integration" is not easily defined. For the purposes of this sourcebook three shades of meaning will be used:

1. to internalize and incorporate new knowledge;
2. to teach the language skills together rather than as separate subjects;
3. to cut across subject matter lines and focus on real life problems.

Further, there are four underlying principles of integration.

1. Integration may be defined as "bringing together parts into a whole."

2. The transfer of learning from one experience to another is the responsibility of the teacher and the program.

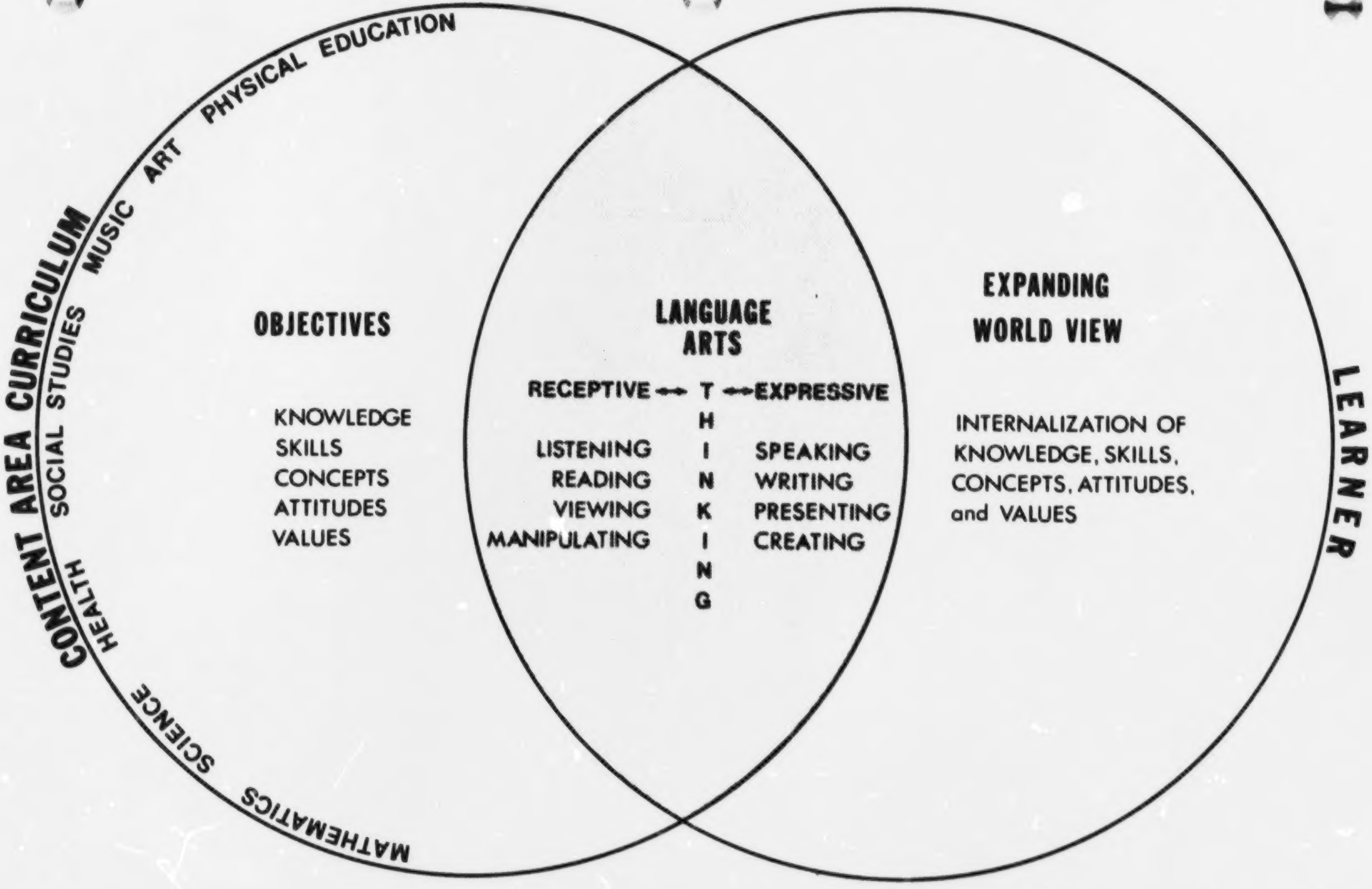
3. For the learner, "integration" or the "whole child approach" can be thought of in terms of personal development (physical, social, emotional, intellectual and moral) and "internalization" through thought processes inspired by the total program of the teacher.

4. Well-planned programs can facilitate integration in classroom experiences by:

   - clearly defining goals and objectives;
   - cross-referencing within and between guides (i.e., cross-discipline and cross-levels);
   - providing some consistency in program format;
   - providing samples/models of interdisciplinary or cross-discipline projects such as themes, learning centres, etc.;
   - including sections on strategies for involving students in the processes of planning, organizing, choosing and evaluating learning activities.[7]

Planning an Integrated Unit

The process of integration is illustrated in the schematic drawing on the opposite page. It should be noted that language arts crosses all content areas with thinking being the integration component that links


PHYSICAL EDUCATION
ART
MUSIC
SOCIAL STUDIES
HEALTH
SCIENCE
MATHEMATICS
CONTENT AREA CURRICULUM
OBJECTIVES
KNOWLEDGE
SKILLS
CONCEPTS
ATTITUDES
VALUES
LANGUAGE ARTS
RECEPTIVE ↔ T ↔ EXPRESSIVE
THINKING
LISTENING
READING
VIEWING
MANIPULATING
SPEAKING
WRITING
PRESENTING
CREATING
EXPANDING WORLD VIEW
INTERNALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, CONCEPTS, ATTITUDES, and VALUES
LEARNER

PROCESS OF INTEGRATION

Chart courtesy of Mickey Kuprowsky, Early Years Consultant, Transcona-Springfield School Division No. 12.

what the child receives and that which the child produces. The following questions will assist in the development of an integrated unit:

1. What basic concept should the child learn? (e.g., Change)
2. In what content areas can this concept be developed? (e.g., social studies: change and growth in the child and his or environment; science: change in matter; it is not necessary to try to integrate every subject area into a theme)
3. What theme or focus will develop the concept? (e.g., changes in me)
4. What are the objectives of the activities being planned? [e.g., What knowledge should the child learn? Changes in body, growth (teeth, height, weight); What thinking or research skills should the child learn? Recording and comparing growth over a period of a year. What attitudes/values should the child understand? Bodily changes are a normal part of life. One should accept differences in people.]
5. Are the activities structured in a way that includes the four strands of the language arts (listening, speaking, reading, writing)?
6. In what ways might these activities be extended? (e.g., into mathematics: measurement, graphing; into art: drawing self portraits)
7. In what way is the evaluation going to take place? (e.g., anecdotal records: short comments on observations of types of questions, predictions, and answers the child gave)

FOOTNOTES

[1] Karen R. Mock, "Multicultural Education in Early Childhood: A Developmental Rationale," Multicultural Early Childhood Education (Toronto: University of Toronto Guidance Centre, 1984), p. 8.

[2] Mary Baratta-Lorton, Mathematics Their Way (Menlo Park, CA: Addison-Wesley, 1976).

[3] W. Lambert Brittain, Creativity, Art and the Young Child (New York: Macmillan, 1979), p. 19.

[4] Barbara Heberholz, Early Childhood Art (Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown, 1974), p. 149.

[5] Brittain, pp. 23-46.

[6] Frank Wachowiak, Emphasis Art, 3rd ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1977), p. 33.

[7] This definition of integration with the four underlying principles was adopted by the Early Years Program Review Committee, Manitoba Education, in 1984.

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CHAPTER FIVE

ORGANIZATION OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

I. THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The classroom environment in an early years education program affects both the atmosphere and expectancies for learning. "Any environment has four dimensions (time, space, people, things), and each dimension can contribute to learning."[1]

The Importance of the Child's Concept of Time

It is important to begin with the time dimension when organizing an early years program. A young child's concept of time differs from that of an adult. Flexibility in time scheduling is a must. Teachers should concentrate more on task development than on completion within a particular time frame. Scheduling and strict routines can often undermine rather than help the child's constructive use of time.[2]

Young Children's Need of Ample Space

The room should provide safe, pleasant, functional and stimulating surroundings so that the children have many opportunities to play and learn, both independently and with each other. In general, most early years teachers feel the need for more floor space than can be provided by a classroom built for regular classes. The integrated, child-centred, activity approach calls for space for a variety of learning centres, for large and small group work, for quiet carpeted areas and for tiled areas that allow for play with water, sand, paint, and other messy materials. Usually the young child has no assigned place in the room, needing freedom for movement as he or she learns to act independently and reasonably. Early years equipment and supplies also require adequate storage space. Innovative school teams, however, cooperate in meeting this requirement in a variety of ways, and resourceful and creative teachers find many ways to make the best use of classroom design and size.

Early Years Furnishings

As early years activities are action-oriented and largely individualized, furnishings must be safe, portable, light in weight and child-sized. Floors, walls, and ceilings should absorb sound. Where possible, the early years rooms should be located on the ground floor with windows at children's eye level. (Note: It is an asset to the early years room, particularly the kindergarten, to have a sink in the classroom and easy access to bathrooms with low toilets and wash basins.)

It is not necessary to provide a table and chair for each child; a dozen light stacking chairs and six or seven stacking tables should be ample. Built in storage space for use by the children is a necessity, and each child should have a clothes hook and shelf or locker space for shoes and other personal items. There should also be some high cupboards for the teacher's use. Portable dividers, cubbyholes, shelves, and carts are also recommended. A piano and a rocking chair should be provided, if at all possible. Because sand and water play are essential parts of an early years program, all early years classrooms need a sandbox in the room or in an adjoining indoor space. A sandbox lid can be used as a surface for drying paintings. A set of large climbing apparatus should be available at all times, and some of the items can be rotated and shared with other classes. The large climbing apparatus may have to be set up in the gymnasium or in an adjoining hallway.

Interactions with Peers and Adults: The Social Adjustment of the Child

Children coming to an early years class are placed in a situation where they need to develop personal behaviour patterns in relation to both peers and adults. These children need help in recognizing that other people have equally important rights and that, to be happy and productive in a social setting, they must compromise and develop patience in adapting comfortably to new patterns of socialization. Children also need help in learning the language of social manners and respect. As children learn to adapt in the school community, they may also become more skilled in dealing with changing home and extended community environments. It is important, therefore, that parents realize that the teacher who is concerned with helping children to feel loved and secure, competent and creative, is contributing significantly to their social growth. Parents can actively cooperate by positively reinforcing the desired behaviour.

There is a real danger that, in concentrating on each child's personal feelings, adults may neglect to focus enough attention on a child's obligations to others. Children have to be helped to operate happily in groups, to defer satisfaction, and to find pleasure in cooperation and in generosity toward others. Children of this age are naturally egocentric and have to mature to the point where they realize they cannot always make decisions totally based on their own needs and desires. Adults should remember that

in the early years, children are moving into a stage where peer approval becomes very necessary to their growing and changing concept of themselves. They need approval from others to feel good about themselves. The foundations for a happy pre-adolescence and adolescence may be laid in the early years.

The adults working in an early years program must be perceptive, observant, and ready to guide. Opportunities to explain, to practice a new skill, or to reinforce one already being learned, must be seized as they occur. A few simple rules can be formulated in group discussion periods with children and should be enforced almost without exception. For example, if it is agreed that a tricycle may be used in a designated safe area, then this rule should be consistently enforced.

> The basis for all classroom learning is communication between people. In early childhood, many children are nonreaders, and peer group intercommunication contributes to learning.[3]
>
> Chris Nash, The Learning Environment

II. INTRODUCING THE CHILD TO THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Visiting Next Year's Classroom

To avoid confusion and fear for the young child, teachers should invite groups of four or five children on successive days in June to the next year's classroom. This process is particularly important for the soon-to-be kindergarten child because it will be likely his/her first contact with the school environment. The teacher can then talk to the children individually and take them on a tour around the classroom. This is not a time to give any screening tests to the children as these might only frighten and confuse them.

If the kindergarten provides a booklet to take home, the children could be given it at this time. While the kindergarten children are visiting their future classroom, and if they are willing to remain on their own, their parents might be meeting with the principal and the resource teachers to discuss ways in which parents can be supportive of the aims of the kindergarten and ways in which they can contribute to the program in a volunteer capacity. Parents should be encouraged to ask questions and to make comments; after all, their children are about to embark on an experience which is of vital concern to them and everyone wants the year to be happy and fulfilling.

Staggered Entrance in September

Many teachers find that they can establish a better relationship with each child if staggered entrance is planned. Children feel more comfortable if they begin this new experience in small groups. If staggered entrance is to take place, children and parents should know well in advance so that the children are not disappointed to find that they have to stay home on some days of the first week.

III. MEETING THE EMERGING ACADEMIC NEEDS

Children in the early years are generally ready to develop rapidly in motor, communicative, and cognitive skills which are the foundations for learning. The teacher should be aware of these growth patterns and seize opportunities to foster their development. It is not the kindergarten teacher's responsibility to teach reading, writing, and mathematical skills per se, but rather, to create an environment in which pre-reading, pre-writing, and pre-mathematics skills will emerge for the child who is developmentally ready to acquire them. The creative teacher will devise a variety of interesting and challenging activities and games to integrate the acquisition of such skills into the regular program. Some children develop special interests and reach out for symbolic learning at an early age. For those children who begin to read and to work with numbers, additional planning is required in order to offer activities for them. These activities should continue only as long as the children have these particular interests. The teacher must always recognize and accept individual learning patterns and characteristics. The important role of the teacher is to recognize and provide opportunities for learning.

The child's learning must come through play. If he or she develops more sophisticated ways of perceiving and of conceptualizing, the program will have to be both enhanced and enriched. Rigid mechanical teaching of skills which disregard the child's interests or developmental level has no place in an early years program. The total learning environment should reflect the following major goals.

Language Growth

The teacher:

- helps and encourages the children to enlarge and enrich their vocabularies;
- helps children to listen to the rhythmic and syntactical patterns of language;
- provides a model for language but respects the varying levels of language in the class;
- helps children to experience the excitement of beautiful, expressive language and the power which comes from the ability to use language well;
- helps children to discover that there is a power and permanency about the written word;
- helps children to recognize that a statement in written form is not necessarily a statement of fact;
- helps children to relate their spoken language to writing and reading.

Perceptual Growth

Through games, children are introduced to activities which require:

- increasing powers of visual discrimination;
- sharpening of auditory discrimination to include rhyming, hearing specific sounds, and repeating sounds;
- increasing ability to classify and categorize;
- increasing ability to arrange things into a series;
- increasing ability to continue a simple series of patterns;
- increasing sensitivity to all sensory stimuli.

Perceptual-Motor Growth

The child:

- establishes a pattern of handedness. Exercises such as hauling in rope, batting at a bean bag, and football kick-off should show the dominant and non-dominant sides of the child;
- engages in activities which provide directional variation and which also give hands and eyes practice in the left-to-right directionality needed in writing and reading.

Body Awareness

The child:

- becomes increasingly aware of the position of his or her body in space. Kinesthetic activities develop awareness of body parts and how they function, and increase a sense of balance;
- needs to develop an internal reference for the relationship between the extremities of the body and the trunk. The information which comes from balance mechanisms, muscles, and sense organs must be collected and organized in the brain. Given the freedom to keep and explore their own potentialities, children begin to develop an awareness of what they can do, thereby gaining a new respect for themselves.

IV. NURTURING CURIOSITY AND CREATIVITY

Children who are awakening to the wonder and complexity of their world have many questions to ask and are entitled to answers from their parents and teachers. These answers should be intellectually honest but stated in terms that children can understand. The child who is asking about lightning may have seen the flash of a short circuit and be satisfied that these two phenomena have much in common. That child may be more satisfied, however, if the teacher gets batteries and wire from the school science supplies and creates a "jumping" current.

Because children are only just beginning to learn how to organize and interpret information, they can hold contradictory explanations and not be troubled. They are also apt to cling to an old erroneous explanation even when offered a new one. It is necessary to make first explanations that can be built on by accommodation, rather than ones that inhibit future learning.

It is sound pedagogy for children to be helped to do simple experiments or to be given appropriate pictures or materials to enable them to find their own answers. Children who do not receive some response to their important questions generally give up asking them. Blocking their natural curiosity seriously impedes future learning. Curiosity must then be restimulated by a persevering teacher.

Creativity can be defined as "being able to think or express oneself in an original manner." Each child receives sensory stimulation and organizes this information in unique ways. Children who have their ideas ignored or ridiculed generally cease to be creative and try to produce what the teacher expects. A child who feels secure that the teacher will accept, understand, and praise his or her fledgling efforts will continue to be creative. The young child is not ready for consistently logical thinking. Teachers can foster creativity by encouraging the child to think in ways that do not require logic or realistic viewpoints.

As children develop into divergent thinkers, they may freely express their ideas in inventions, visual art forms, music, and literature. It is important that teachers do not stifle the child-like thinking which appears to be illogical. It has been said that the science fiction of one generation can become the scientific fact of the next. While logic is a powerful tool for learning, creativity is the source of original ideas and can add joy to life. Creativity needs encouragement and stimulation, but it also needs protection. The child who grows up able to be creative when creativity is needed, and logical when logic is necessary, develops into a powerful thinker. (Also see: Chapter Four, Art in the Early Years.)

V. MEETING THE PHYSICAL NEEDS

See Chapter Four, "Physical Activity During Early Childhood" and the K-12 Physical Education (1981) curriculum guide.

Early years and physical education teachers have in recent years been more attentive to the need and value of physical activity programs for children prior to and during their initial school experience. Essentially movement programs at this level should expose children to a wide variety of appropriate physical activities in order that they may acquire efficiency in basic movement or gross motor skills. Gross motor skills are categorized in the areas of balance/stability, transport/locomotor and manipulative/striking abilities. Balance is necessary to maintain and control posture and body position both during motion and at rest. Balance is fundamental in performing all physical activities. Transport skills are used in moving the body from one location to another. They include walking, running, rolling, sliding, jumping, hopping, skipping, and galloping. They are performed in isolation or in combination. Manipulative/striking abilities are used in receiving, handling, and propelling an object to perform such tasks as catching, kicking, striking, or throwing. Most games require some form of manipulation.

Prior to beginning school, children develop and start to refine gross motor skills as they gain a mastery of their bodies and environment. They acquire gross motor skills in a sequence of phases, the origin of which began with the reflex level of functioning. These develop to the point where specialized movement skills allow the middle years child to learn and participate in a variety of sports and games. Through the acquisition of gross motor skills and fitness, children are able to participate successfully in a variety of progressive and appropriate physical activities.

VI. ORGANIZING THE CLASSROOM

In order to implement an early years program certain considerations must be made. These considerations should provide choice for children in order that they might take charge of their own learning.

The classroom should allow:

- easy movement from one activity to another
  - promotes physical and academic freedom
- open and closed spaces
  - allows noisy/quiet work
  - allows independent/group work
- flexibility in the room management
  - allows change of areas as needed
- availability and visibility of materials
  - promotes self-directedness
  - promotes decision-making

Before developing activities and centres for the child, the teacher needs to know:

- the concepts, skills and content the children are capable of learning;
- the materials needed for both the teacher and the children;
- the resources that are available through the community;
- how to arrange the materials in order to motivate the children;
- the method of evaluation and records that need to be kept.

Note: These records should not be available to anyone except those adults directly involved with the child. Charts indicating a child's proficiency should never be on display. Most small children generally give of their best; thus, extrinsic motivation only adds another degree of frustration to the child who is young or developmentally slow.

The Learning Materials

The content of the program will determine the materials or things which the child will use. The description of the centres which follows, as well as the many curriculum guides available at Manitoba Education, provide detailed descriptions of materials and program content.

VII. THE LEARNING CENTRES

Developing good oral language skills is one of the most important tasks for the young child. Talking, questioning, drawing conclusions, and making inferences should be part of the learning occurring in every activity centre and in every activity of the day. Children should be improving their listening ability, learning to follow directions, becoming curious about the written word, and feeling the need

DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVES

What The Child Learns Through Play

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Develops independence in:
- choosing activities,
- seeing to personal needs, and
- meeting new challenges.

Develops confidence in self and abilities.

Begins to control emotions in socially acceptable ways.

Moves from absorption with self to awareness of others.

Moves towards cooperative play.

Extends concentration and attention span.

PSYCHOMOTOR DEVELOPMENT

Develops coordination necessary for:
- stability (balance, rhythm, control),
- locomotion (walk, run, hop, skip and climb), and
- manipulation (handles small toys; traces, colours, and cuts).

Becomes increasingly graceful and rhythmically expressive.

DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Learns to distinguish self from others.

Becomes aware of family and social relationships.

Develops sensory awareness.

Identifies most body parts.

Increases knowledge of specific plants and animals.

Becomes aware of growth, change and ecological independence.

Increases knowledge of properties of common nonliving things, such as sound and water.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Masters speech sounds appropriate to age.

Learns speech structures:
- simple sentences,
- past tense and
- pronouns.

Uses oral language with confidence for a range of purposes:
- name, describe, compare;
- explain, reason, predict;
- direct, question, judge; and
- express imagination.

Develops vocabulary, becoming more elaborate and precise.

Learns to follow directions.

Develops thinking skills basic to reading:
- sequence, details, character.

Develops concepts of print:
- left-to-right orientation, and
- second-letter relationships.

Develops reading strategies:
- picture cues,
- context cues, and
- phonic cues.

Moves from oral composing to beginning writing:
- own name and few words, and
- personal composing.

INTELLECTUAL AND MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

Identifies basic attributes such as colour, shape, and size.

Classifies according to basic attributes.

Subclassifies and cross-classifies (age seven).

Orders a series of graduated objects.

Extends and reorders a graduated sequence.

Recognizes and creates a repetitive pattern.

Extends spatial concepts:
- self in space, and
- objects in space.

Relates parts to whole.

Learns one-to-one correspondence.

Understands sets.

Learns measurement and time (relative).

Learns conservation of number and length.

Moves from concrete to increasingly abstract concepts and representations.

ARTS DEVELOPMENT

Develops creativity and imaginative expression in:
- picture-making,
- two and three-dimensional models, and
- movement and dance.

Learns to distinguish:
- pitch,
- rhythm and tempo,
- timbre, and
- volume.

Learns to sing a repertoire of songs and action games.

Extends individual fantasy into socio-dramatic play.

Early Experiences by Susanne Eden,
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to write things for themselves. Language and thinking are closely related, and the astute teacher will take advantage of opportunities to encourage children to do their own thinking and to express their own thoughts.

The number and kind of learning centres available will vary according to the needs and interests of the children and the learning goals or objectives.

Centres may be temporary or permanent. Temporary centres are those set-up according to themes, interests, skill development or seasonal availability of materials. (See section on developing interest centres in this chapter.) Permanent centres will be available to children on a year-round basis. The materials in the centres will vary, but the centre itself will remain in use for the entire year. Following are suggestions for centres that should be made available on a full-time basis.

Block and Large Manipulative Centre

This centre contains the same type of manipulative toys the child may have used in nursery school or in a day care centre. Activities need to be designed to enhance gross and small muscle development and to develop sensory discrimination. Many toys such as blocks, trucks, wagons and tricycles can be used in both unstructured play as well as in structured learning. Many materials from this centre can be transferred to other centres as the need arises.

Purposes

- develops large muscle control
- provides opportunities for classification
- provides opportunities for cooperative play
- provides opportunities for imaginative play

Suggestions for Use

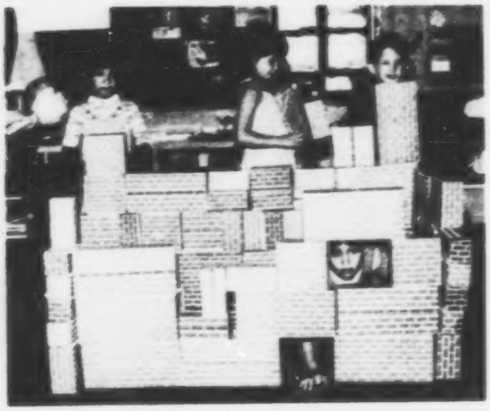
Place this centre close to the dramatic play centre in order that imaginative play might be extended, e.g., a garage could be built for the "fire station."

Manipulative Material Centre

The manipulative material centre, for the development of fine muscle control, may exist as a separate centre or may be incorporated into other areas such as the quiet area or the math/science centres.

Purposes

- developes fine muscle control
- develops eye-hand coordination
- provides opportunities for cooperative play
- provides opportunities for imaginative play
- develops perceptual-motor abilities



Equipment

- lego
- tinkertoys
- beads
- puzzles
- 'Fisher-Price type' toys
- bolts and nuts sets
- pick-up sticks
- small blocks
- games such as dominoes, lotto match-ups, etc.

Sandbox and Water Play Centre

All early years classrooms should have sand and water. Sandbox and water play activities are happy experiences for most young children. They play completely engrossed for long periods, filling and dumping pails of sand, building castles, and running trucks on imaginary roadways. Children find pleasure in filling a bucket of water and dumping it or pouring it on the sand. If space is limited, a table could be sacrificed to make room for the sandbox, which should of course, be of a height to allow access without strain.

Purposes

- contributes to socialization (also allowing the "shy" or less skillful child to join in and have a feeling of accomplishment)
- improves visual-motor coordination as children consciously try to make their hands work for them
- develops a beginning understanding of number and science
  - estimating and measuring
  - concept of conservation of mass
  - characteristics of water
  - concepts of size, weight, pressure, shape and displacement
- allows opportunity for imaginative play

Suggestions for Use

- holding sand and feeling the mass change as it slips between the finger
- usimg damp sand to leave prints of hands, feet, toys, cookie cutters
- using a sifter, measuring spoons, and measuring cups

- writing in the sand using fingers
- weighing dry sand and weighing the same volume of wet sand
- using measuring cups, spoons and funnels
- controlling sand so that tunnels, roads and bridges can be built
- using shovels and wooden spoons as extensions of the hands
- bathing dolls and washing clothes
- using water and big brushes to "paint" boards, wagons, sidewalks
- adding detergent and blowing bubbles
- changing the colour of water by adding tempera paint or food colour in small quantities (e.g., blue followed by yellow turns to green; blue plastic bottles in yellow water look green)
- looking at reflections in water
- siphoning coloured water by means of a clear plastic tube

Woodworking Centre

Woodworking can be an enormously satisfying activity for young children as they do "real" work with "real" tools. It is not only a popular activity on its own but can enhance other classroom activities as children make signs for the block area, make boats to use in the water table and so on.

Purposes

- develops large and small muscle control
- develops eye-hand coordination
- provides opportunity for creative expression
- provides a productive outlet for feelings of aggression or excess energy
- provides opportunity to learn about the physical properties of wood
- provides opportunity to use mathematical skills such as measuring, fitting together and so on

Equipment

- a sturdy work-bench with vise
- real tools, not toys
  10-13 oz. hammers, some with claws
  12-16 inch sharp, crosscut saws
  rasp
  10 inch smoothing plane } for children who have some experience
  hand-drill or brace and bit } with tools
- ruler and metre-stick
- ample supply of soft wood (pine is very good), often available free from lumber yards

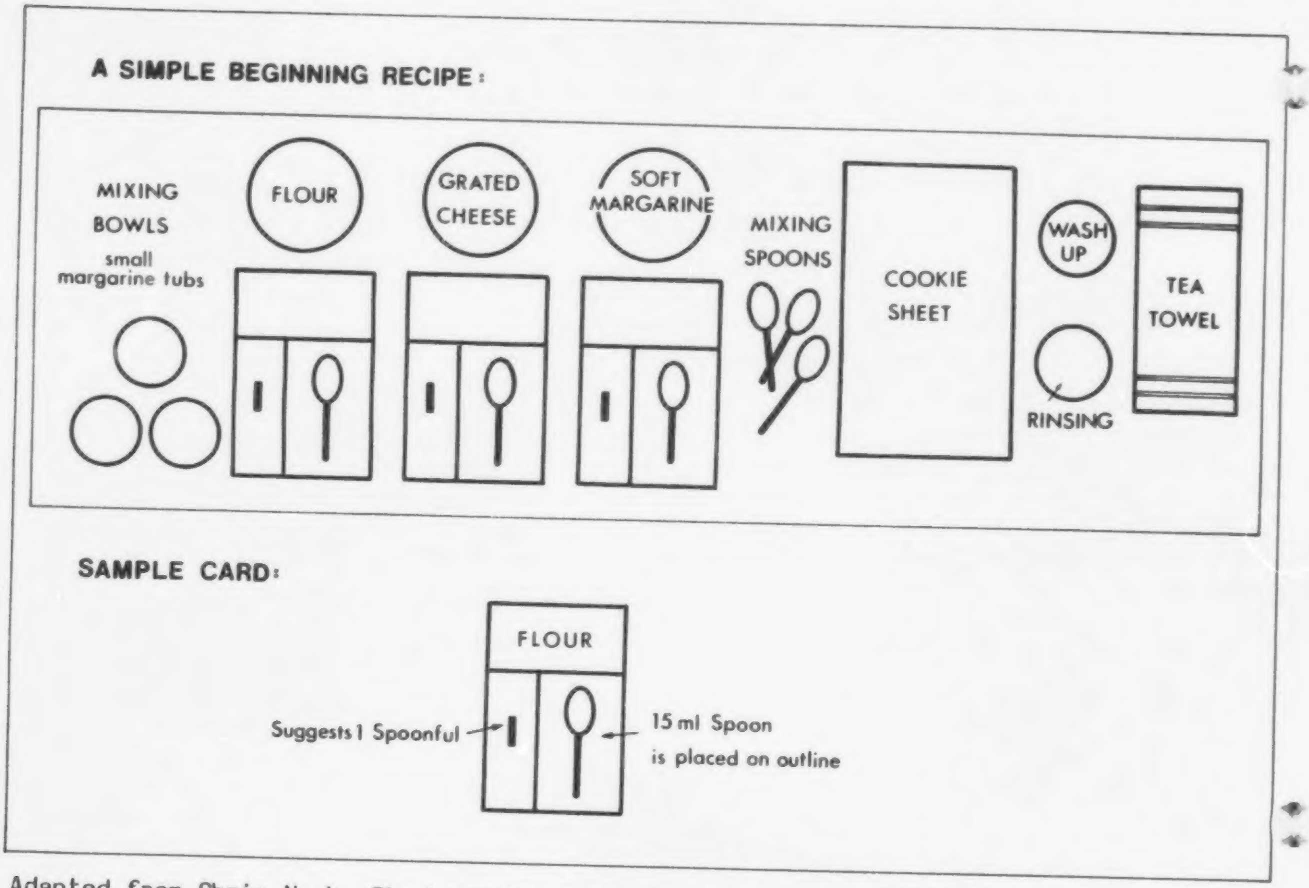
- nails of assorted sizes
- storage space such as shelving or peg-boards
- a large stump can be a good place to begin hammering nails

Cooking Centre

It would be difficult to find an activity which teaches more concepts and creates more enjoyment for children than cooking. Production-line cooking (or cup cooking) is an excellent way to introduce cooking to the early years classroom and integrate many subject areas (math, science, social studies, health and language arts).

Purposes

- provides a feeling of accomplishment when the product is eaten
- provides opportunities for social and language growth
- provides opportunities for encouraging cognitive growth and makes children aware of the significance of words and numbers
- encourages role-playing
- provides opportunities for children to feel important because they are engaging in "adult" activities
- provides a forum for discussion of favourite foods and those of other ethnic groups
- provides an opportunity to interpret stimulations of the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting
- enables children to practice manual dexterity when they beat, pour, grate, and knead, etc.
- enables children to practice following directions
- provides opportunities for consumer education
- presents opportunities to teach good eating and cleanliness habits (When children use whole grain flours, seeds, honey, wheat germ, molasses and dried fruits in their cooking, they learn to enjoy healthy foods.)



A SIMPLE BEGINNING RECIPE:

SAMPLE CARD:

MIXING BOWLS
small margarine tubs
FLOUR
GRATED CHEESE
SOFT MARGARINE
MIXING SPOONS
COOKIE SHEET
WASH UP
RINSING
TEA TOWEL
FLOUR
Suggests 1 Spoonful
15 ml Spoon is placed on outline

Adapted from Chris Nash, The Learning Environment, Collier Macmillan, 1979. Used with permission.

How to Begin

In production-line cooking each child makes one portion so time is not wasted while twenty children watch one child stir. Ingredients are placed on a table with entry from left to right. Small mixing bowls for three or four children are placed at the start, followed by ingredients and cards, mixing spoons, cookie sheet and washing/rinsing water.

A Simple Beginning Recipe

Cheese Crispies

15 ml flour (1 tablespoon)
15 ml grated cheese (1 tablespoon)
5 ml soft margarine (1 teaspoon)

Mix well, first in bowl then with fingers. Roll into ball, then flatten into chosen shape. Place on cookie sheet. Bake 10-12 minutes in a 190°C (375°F) oven.

Many more production-line recipes can be found in:

Beverly Weitch and Thelma Harms, Cook and Learn: A Child's Cookbook, Addison-Wesley, 1981.
Barbara Johnson and Betty Seimons, Cup Cooking, Early Educators Press, 1978.
Chris Nash, The Learning Environment, Collier Macmillan, 1979.

Production-line cooking is a lovely way to introduce cooking into the classroom at any level. Once children have become familiar with the process, they can move on to small group cooking at a centre.

Suggestions for the Smooth, Safe Operation of the Cooking Centre

- Limit the number of children involved until all have learned how to use the centre.
- In the early stages of operation, measure out the ingredients and provide the children with only the exact amounts of each item needed for the project. Later, children can have access to larger supplies and do their own measuring.
- Emphasize that clean-up is part of the cooking activity.
- Provide unbreakable equipment at child-height work areas.
- Keep the rules as simple as possible (i.e., wash your hands and don't touch anything hot without adult supervision).
- Provide the recipe in the form of action picture cards.

Before the first cooking session

- If possible, take the children shopping for the ingredients and make it part of the process.
- Print each recipe on large chart paper.
- Assemble all utensils and ingredients necessary.
- Make arrangements for the dishwashing and drying.

Timers that signal when cooking time is up are very useful. Children seem to be fascinated with sand clocks (egg timers). If necessary, the timer can be turned over several times.

Basic Biscuits

Each recipe makes 12 biscuits. Double or triple as required.

500 ml	flour	A
20 ml	baking powder	
2 ml	salt	
125 ml	shortening	B
175 ml	milk	C

Each child is responsible for A,B or C.

Method:

1. Mix A together.
2. Cut in B.
3. Add C. Blend with fork until evenly moistened.
4. Put dough on floured surface. Make it into a ball. Knead 20 times, approximately. Roll to 1.5 cm thick. Cut into shapes. Bake approximately 10 minutes at 220°C (425°F) on ungreased sheets.

Biscuit Variations

- Cheese Biscuits:

  Add 175 ml grated cheese after cutting in shortening.

- Raisin Biscuits:

  Add 60 ml sugar to A. Then add 175 ml raisins.
  (Optional: add 5 ml cinnamon to A.)

- Fruit Biscuits:

  Add to A - 30 ml sugar
  - 5 ml cinnamon
  - 175 ml cut mixed peel

- Quick Cinnamon Buns:

  After rolling out dough, butter it lavishly, cover with brown sugar, sprinkle with cinnamon, dot with raisins. (Optional: chopped nuts or coconut.) Roll into log. Cut slices 2 cm thick. Lay on greased sheets or in muffin tins. Bake 12 to 15 minutes at 200°C (400°F).

Muffins

Do not over mix the batter; it should be lumpy. These muffins can also be made into coffee cakes.

Molasses Bran Muffins (1 dozen large)

250 ml whole bran cereal
125 ml milk
125 ml molasses
A

250 ml flour
7 ml baking powder
5 ml baking soda
5 ml salt
B

125 ml raisins or chopped dates (or figs)
80 ml salad oil
1 egg
C

Each child is responsible for A, B or C.

Method:

1. Combine A. Let stand.
2. Combine B. Add raisins. Mix.
3. Add C to A. Beat well.
4. Add A and C to B. Stir until moist.
5. Grease muffin cups (or paper ones). Fill 2/3 full.
6. Bake 20-25 minutes at 200°C (400°F).

Other Suggestions

- Use your own recipes.
- Make a fruit jelly using a cup of boiling water and a cup of crushed ice.
- Prepare other ethnic dishes.
- Make butter or peanut butter.
- Prepare hot chocolate.
- Make pancakes.
- Make applesauce.
- Boil macaroni and add grated cheese and canned tomatoes.
- Make bannock (see below).

A Manitoba Example of a Social Studies Oriented Cooking Activity

Because we live in a multicultural province, the children should experience different ethnic cooking. These experiences should reflect the composition of the neighbourhood. For instance, bannock was originally a Scottish dish brought to Manitoba by the Red River Settlers. The Native people recognized that it was a food appropriate for their lifestyles and learned to make it.

Plan to make bannock along with a variety of other similar breads and compare the method of cooking, the taste, the appearance, etc. If there is no oven in the school, a counter-top broiler will do.

Chippewa bannock - from Brochet

1 L flour
80 ml lard
10 ml salt
45 ml baking soda
375 ml warm water

Mix dry ingredients together. Rub in lard. Make a hole in centre. Add water and knead a it. Grease cookie sheet or oblong pan. Pat dough into 3-4 cm thickness. Poke holes in top with fork. Bake 25-30 minutes at 230°C (450°F). Berries in season or raisins may be added.

Cree bannock - from Grand Rapids

720 ml flour
5 ml salt
150-375 ml warm water
15-20 ml baking powder
60 ml melted lard

Cook as for Chippewa bannock.

Irish soda bread

500 ml whole wheat flour
500 ml white flour
500 ml sour milk or buttermilk
5 ml salt
7 ml baking soda
30 ml soft butter

Sift flour, salt, and baking powder. Rub in butter. Stir in milk. Turn onto floured board and knead lightly. Shape into 2 loaves. Place in floured loaf pans. Bake at 190°C (375°F) for 45 minutes.

Bernelda Wheeler's I Can't Have Bannock But the Beaver Has a Dam (Pemmican Press, 1984) is an excellent children's book which is available.

Science: Exploration and Discovery Centre

This centre should be changed as the need arises. The activities which happen in this centre will depend largely on the children's interests, which they have demonstrated by the things they bring to school, the questions they ask, and the discussions which have developed in some of their large group activities. Old appliances and small machines may be placed in this centre for the child to take apart and explore.

Purposes

- provides the child with an opportunity to develop concepts in science, nature and social studies
- allows the child to observe, manipulate, classify
- sparks the child's curiosity

Equipment

- artifacts, pictures, books of an ethnic or cultural group
- things to feel, smell, hear and observe (Children can identify sourness, sweetness, saltiness, and bitterness by tasting such things as oranges, grapefruits, various jellies, salted and unsalted peanuts, yogurt, dates, and raisins, etc. Any tasting activities should take place under adult supervision.)
- materials suggested for science activities (see Science K-6 curriculum guide)
- the materials used in the manipulative-perceptual centre
- seeds and things that grow
- rock and shell displays
- animal pets
- books
- objects of interest brought by children
- old appliances such as toasters, radios, telephones for taking apart and putting back together, and tools to do this

> Thinking can be extended from one centre to another; e.g., old appliances "taken apart" might be used in the Art Centre to create a sculpture.

Suggested Activities

- making rain by placing a cold pie plate in steam
- watching a balloon or an inner tube increase in size
- simulating thunder by blowing up two paper bags and banging them together
- making sparks jump to simulate lightning (to be done under adult supervision)
- keeping frogs' eggs or toads' eggs to the tadpole stage or longer
- setting up a chemical garden
- keeping a chart of personal growth
- measuring temperature inside and outside of a snow house
- observing life in an aquarium or terrarium
- looking at outdoor ant hills or obtaining an ant farm
- planting seeds
- exploring artifacts of a particular ethnic group

> Remember the "teachable moment." Much significant learning takes place when the child's interest takes priority.

Dramatic Play Centre

All children enjoy imaginative play. They love to "play house," or "play hospital" or "play store." This centre can provide opportunities for the various forms of dramatic play by providing a variety of boxes filled with different props. The children can then choose the form their play will take.

Purposes

- affords excellent stimulation for language use and development
- provides opportunities to recognize and consider social and cultural differences.
- encourages role playing and decision making which involve organization and planning
- provides practice in social skills such as respecting property rights, sharing, cooperating in play, taking part in group enterprise, doing one's share of family duties
- encourages creative and divergent thinking
- provides opportunities for classifying and organizing into categories
- provides a practical situation in which the child becomes responsible for putting things back where they belong

Basic Equipment

- stove and refrigerator
- table and chairs
- telephone
- doll carriage
- crib or cradle and bedding
- stroller
- dolls and clothes
- baby supplies
- housekeeping tools (broom, mop, etc.)
- sink or dishpan
- pans, dishes, cutlery, cooking utensils, bowls
- boxes filled with props (see suggestions below)

Store

- cash register
- play money
- empty food containers
- bags

Doctor's Office

- white shirts
- bandages
- stethoscope
- nurse's hats
- plastic syringes (needles removed)

Carpentry Shop

- screwdrivers
- hammer
- screws
- wood pieces
- old paint cans and brushes
- ruler

Fire Station

- rubber raincoat
- hosing
- fire hats

Hairdresser

- curlers
- empty shampoo bottles
- old hair dryer
- combs, brushes
- mirror

Post Office

- rubber stamp and ink pad
- postman's bag
- hat
- mailbox
- paper and envelopes

Library and Listening Centre

Develop a secluded, comfortable spot where children can browse among pictures, picture books, fold-out books, and easy-to-read books. Sharing and talking should be encouraged. This is the place for records, record players, tape recorders and cassettes, and viewers. If an aide, volunteer, or visiting story-teller is available, that person should be ready to read the stories or poems the children ask for. He or she can help children who are trying to read by telling them the words they ask about.

When several copies of an easy-to-read book are available, those children who are very eager to learn to read will enjoy following along on each page as it is read to them. Children enjoy hearing a story several times, especially if it is well read. Occasionally, a young child can read well enough to entertain small groups of classmates. Others may be able to tell familiar stories to themselves on tape. If a listening station or tape recorder is available, the teacher can record favourite stories and books. If signals are used to indicate that a page is to be turned, the child can follow along and enjoy the illustrations. When headsets are provided, children can listen, oblivious to the noises in the room.

Writing Centre

The Writing Centre may exist as a separate centre or may be incorporated into other areas such as the library/listening centre. Children must be given the freedom and opportunity to write. Curiosity about written langugage begins in an interest in scribbling and drawing.

Purposes

- to provide opportunities to scribble, copy and write
- to provide opportunity for creative expression
- to provide opportunity to translate sound and thought into print
- to strengthen the connection between spoken and written language

Equipment

- paper of different shapes and sizes
- blank booklets of different shapes and sizes
- pencils, markers, crayons
- pictures for story starters
- alphabet models
- dictionaries
- word blanks and/or key word files
- writing folders
- typewriters
- publishing materials, etc.

Art Centre

> Children's art is a joy to the child and to the adult who knows how to appreciate it. Give young children materials and opportunities to explore all art media and talk with them about their creations if they want to.

Materials and Equipment

In the appendix of the K-6 Art curriculum guide, there is a list of basic materials and equipment needed for the program. Early years teachers are especially cautioned not to buy equipment which can prove frustrating to young children who may have poorly developed manipulative skills. Plastic or blunt scissors, oversized crayons and crumbly playdough often present the child with greater problems than necessary. A good variety of drawing and painting tools, some which make fine lines and some thick and several different types of papers are materials which allow for both large- and small-scale art works. A good balance of two- and three-dimensional materials are recommended.

The Room

Art is often taught in the regular classroom. Yet teachers do not always see the classroom itself as an exercise in design. The classroom should be welcoming and interesting without overloading the visual circuits! It should have different areas for different types of learning experiences, and desks or tables should be arranged and rearranged to accommodate different learning activities. The child, like the adult, is very much influenced by the physical environment, and teachers should evaluate the learning space with the same consideration given to the lesson plan. It, too, should work with the goals of the program and not against them.

Mathematics Learning Centre

Even after this centre is set up, teachers should continue to take advantage of the many opportunities for developing mathematical concepts and skills in other centres or activities. Use the *K-6 Mathematics* curriculum guide for appropriate concepts and skills.

Purposes

Provides opportunities for children to:

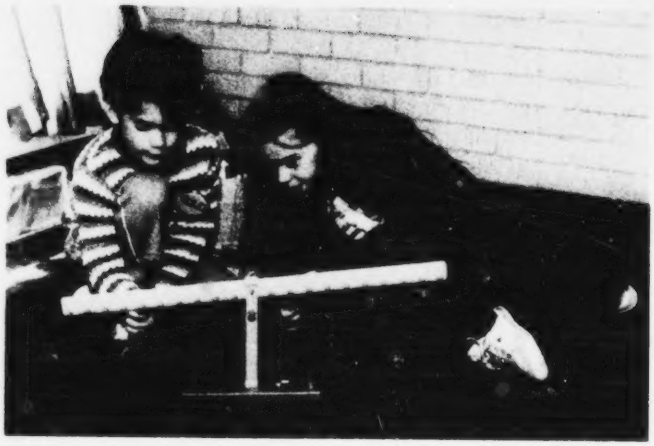
- learn number symbols
- begin measuring using non-standard units such as hands, feet, thumbs, tiles, paper clips and standard units such as metre sticks, litre jugs, cups, and scales
- begin to see the pattern in the number system
- begin to use specific vocabulary: longer, shorter, taller; heavier, lighter; too much, too many; thin, thick; few, less; before, after, etc.
- learn to recognize and name simple shapes such as triangles, rectangles, squares and circles
- categorize according to shape or number

- begin to tell time
- begin to form the concept of conservation
- practice patterning, make symmetrical designs
- place objects in one-to-one correspondence
- make and interpret simple graphs, e.g., to show attendance as up or down from yesterday, score in a game, birthdays by months

Equipment

- measuring units: cups, spoons, tapes, rulers (metric), kitchen scales
- counting frames
- counters (in containers)
- pegs and boards
- beads, lima beans
- design cards for beading
- wooden sticks of various lengths
- boxes of shapes varying in size and colour
- trays (styrofoam from meat and bakery counters)
- egg cartons
- unifex cubes
- geometric shape puzzles
- calendars
- wood cylinders (Montessori-type)
- anything that can be sorted
- containers to sort things into
- playing cards
- tongue depressors
- play money
- checkers with magnets attached
- bingo chips
- bread tags
- beading frames
- small bean bags
- sand for measuring and pouring
- water and beakers
- clock
- egg timer
- magnetic board
- cuisinaire rods
- popsicle sticks
- attribute blocks
- geoboards and rubber bands
- dominoes
- cups and boxes
- hula hoops in various colours
- number line on floor or wall
- block design cards
- parquetry blocks

Activities



It is important for the children to have free exploration of the materials before the teacher structures activities. This is a necessary first step. The teacher observes this exploration and directs the child to explore further with suitable activities.

See also:

- Problem Solving Handbook for Grades K-2 Mathematics (1983)
- Mary Baratta-Lorton, Mathematics Their Way, 1976.

Developing an Interest Centre

Centres of interest can be developed when children exhibit curiosity about specific topics. An interest in families may be sparked by a child bringing a family photo to share with his classmates.

Determine what basic concept the child should learn: families.

Determine the content areas in which this concept can be developed (grade 1):

Social Studies

- What is a family?
- Why do we have families?
- How are families the same?
- How are families different?

Science

- How are family members interdependent?

Determine what theme or focus that will develop the concept: a family centre.

Determine the objectives of the activities being planned:

Knowledge

- The child should indicate an understanding of family differences and similarities and of why we have families.

Thinking or research skills

- The child should be able to discuss types of families, why families are important, no matter what their similarities or differences.
- The child should be able to identify various family members and roles they perform.
- The child should be able to role play various duties of family members.

Attitudes/Values

- The child should be able to express ideas about families, their similarities and differences, and listen to others express their ideas.
- The child should be able to display tolerance for and acceptance of family differences.
- The child should realize family members are interdependent.

Design activities that allow for listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as those that may be extended:

- art - family portraits
- mathematics - graphing of numbers of family members
- music - songs about families
- field trips - to a few of the children's homes (especially the teacher's home)

Evaluate on the basis of anecdotal records made by observing the child's progress.

Determine materials that can be used for the activities:

- clothing for role playing
- paper (various kinds and colours)
- felt pens, crayons, etc.
- books (easy reading, picture, tapes and books, depending on level of the children) emphasizing family differences and similarities
- display areas (for children's work)
- opportunities to discuss families in a small group with a facilitator

Field Trips

The main purposes served by field trips are:

- to give pleasure in going somewhere together as a group and being able to talk, discover and share;
- to contribute naturally to oral language development;
- to provide stimulation and motivation before introducing a topic: zoo, farm bakery, grocery store, etc.;
- to satisfy the curiosity which has developed in a centre of interest--in a farm, creamery, hatchery, etc.;
- to provide a culminating activity following a unit or centre of interest project;

- to provide an opportunity to practice social behaviour, e.g., visit to a Senior Citizens' Home;
- to provide experiences which some children may not have had, e.g., boat, train, bus, museum, airport, supermarket;
- to provide cross-cultural experiences.

Planning

The success of the trip will depend on careful planning. The teacher should preview the area to be visited to make certain that the facilities are adequate. Is there a safe place for arrival? Are toilet facilities available? How many people will be required to drive and to supervise children? Is there someone who can be placed in charge if the teacher is incapacitated or must go with a child if an emergency develops? What expenses are involved? Can travelling at peak periods be avoided? If tickets are to be bought, will the staff be willing to let each child experience purchasing his or her own ticket or should this be done by one person? Will there be an opportunity to obey traffic signals? What signals will be used to indicate where the group is assembling? Should space be reserved? What might the children learn? (Children can assimilate only so much on each visit, so expectations should be limited.)

By discussion in class, the children should be well-prepared for what they are to see and how they will be transported and assembled. They should be alerted to observe special things and to report back. They should become familiar with the vocabulary they will need en route. Several well-planned short trips are likely to be of more benefit to young children than one lone, tiring excursion. Within walking distance from most schools there are many interesting places to visit.

Assistance Needed

The teacher should not take children on a field trip unless the help of parents, responsible students, or volunteers can be secured. One adult per group of five students is recommended unless the trip is a fairly simple one by school bus or on foot. At least one other person must know all the details and be ready to assume the teacher's role if necessary. A name and address card (home and school) is a worthwhile precaution.

School divisions have policies with regard to field trips. Be familiar with these. The school principal should know of and be travelling only a short distance. With small children, trips that cannot take place between the hours of school opening and closing should be avoided.

Parents should sign a permission slip which allows the child to take part in school organized trips. They should know the purposes of each trip, when the child will return, and what type of clothing is best suited.

The teacher will have to send the letters of thanks to those people who helped, but the children can draw or paint a picture of something that they enjoyed on the trip. The letters of thanks could be developed as an experience chart. The chart itself may be sent to the people concerned. Occasionally, such charts are displayed by the recipients along with the pictures the children painted or drew and may be the means of creating community interest in further field experiences for their children. Such a trip gives the children the opportunity to express thanks personally, and helpers should be alerted to see that this is done courteously.

Suggestions for Field Trips

- a trip completely around a city block to see types of homes, growing things, birds, and people
- a trip to the zoo to see certain animals in particular, but with free time for other exploration
- a trip to a farm (This can be one of the most satisfying trips for city children but requires detailed advance preparation. On a very successful trip, children were able to handle baby animals, ride on a wagon attached to a tractor, sit on machinery, and eat their lunch in the hayloft. The afternoon was given to group activities, which all shared in turn, such as:
  - watching the farmer milk a cow by hand and seeing the calf fed;
  - going into the dairy barn to watch milking by machine;
  - watching one round of the combine; and
  - going into the honey-house to watch the extractor and to taste honey and crackers.

  Most parents were so impressed with the excitement and the learning generated by this trip that they wanted assurance that it would become an annual event so their younger children would get the same opportunity to see a farm in operation.)
- a trip to local entertainment (Many groups who plan an evening performance will put on a matinee if their show is suitable for children and they can be assured of an audience.)
- a trip to a bakery, grocery store or some simple local industry which children can understand
- a trip to visit a Senior Citizens' Home (Many residents in these homes miss seeing children, and arrangements can sometimes be made with the directors for regular monthly visits. Occasionally an adoptive relationship develops between an individual resident and a child. Children usually present a program of their games, finger plays, choral speaking, songs, dances, etc. In return a few of the residents can be accommodated as observers in an early years classroom.)
- a trip to the library, grain elevator, another classroom, post office, local park, building site, police station, hatchery (On return to school the children talk freely, developing their new vocabulary.)
- a trip to a child's home to see a pet, a tree-house, new baby, garden or to make something interesting
- a trip to a pet store to buy a pet
- a trip to a nursery school or a day-care centre

Often teachers do not like to take children on field trips to places the children have gone to in previous years. The repetition, however, can extend the learning. As children develop, they see, understand and learn different things. With the familiarity of the surroundings they now may know what questions to ask.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Chris Nash, The Learning Environment (Toronto: Collier Macmillan Canada, 1979), p. 6.

[2] Chris Nash, pp. 15-26.

[3] Chris Nash, p. 10.

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CHAPTER SIX

EARLY IDENTIFICATION THROUGH CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

I. EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

Education in the early years, kindergarten through grade four, lays the foundation for the continuing development of children's skills. In order to plan programming for early years children, teachers need to know at what stage of development each child is within the classroom. Consequently the means to appraise development is crucial to the provision of quality education during the early school years. The process of early identification and education programming is, therefore, an important tool for the teacher. This process, consisting of screening, assessing, programming and evaluating is the same process for all children. It is a means of providing continuity in programming based on children's developmental needs. As children's variabilities in development intensify, further resources and increased collaboration among parents, teachers, resource and support personnel are necessary to ensure the child's success during the early school years.[1]

Screening is an initial component of the process. It is used to gather information on the child's physiological development for an introductory profile. (The term itself is somewhat of a misnomer as the process is not used to screen readiness for school.) It is the teacher's preliminary step in the creation of the developmental profile.

Prior to a child's enrollment in school, or early in the school year, someone from the school division consults with parents to collect relevant medical and family information. This will include results of hearing and vision testing as well as information about the child's motor development and general health.

A standardized screening instrument is sometimes used early in the school year. If this type of screening (which also measures intellectual development) occurs, the information gathered should not lead directly to programming since by its very nature it is designed to indicate only possible variations in development.[2]

The screening information is never a substitute for the teacher's observations of the child within the early years environment. The teacher's observations, which may confirm or reject the screening information, become the basis for collaboration with parents, resource and support personnel in planning ongoing programs for children.

Observation must continue throughout the early school years in order to provide teachers with information to plan suitable programming for all children.

Screening should never be used to label children or to keep them out of school.

II. SCHOOL ENTRANCE: WHEN SHOULD A CHILD START?

All children in Manitoba have opportunity to attend kindergarten. The minimum entrance age for kindergarten is determined by individual school boards. In most school divisions children must be five by November 30 or December 31. Some children, then, may be as young as four years and eight months when entering kindergarten and others are almost a year older. As a result, the teacher must plan programming to encompass this age spread.

On occasion parents are unsure about the wisdom of enrolling children who just barely meet the minimum age requirement for entering kindergarten. In Manitoba, compulsory school age is seven years. Enrollment of a child in kindergarten is, then, at the discretion of the parents. However, a collaborative decision between the parent and the teacher can determine whether or not kindergarten is the next best step to meet the child's current developmental needs. This decision should be based primarily on knowledge of the child's needs gained from systematic observation of the child by the parents and the teacher in the child's present environment.

"The question of the 'best age' to begin school leads to a more fundamental issue. Should the child be ready for school or should the school be ready for the child? The age of entry has less importance when the school is prepared to develop and implement programming based on the developmental needs of every child. Most theoretical models of early childhood education assume that the responsibility for adaptation belongs to the school rather than to the child."[3] This responsibility does not stop as the child enters school but should continue through the early years and beyond.

III. OBSERVATION AND THE DESIRED OUTCOMES OF AN EARLY YEARS PROGRAM

Observation of the child's behaviour as it occurs in a natural setting is an integral part of the early identification and programming process. Observation matches well with the holistic philosophies of early years educators. Self-concept, which is central to all areas of development, can be assessed only by observation.[4]

The classroom, however, must be organized in such a way that the teacher is free to observe. Current research indicates that observation by the classroom teacher in natural settings best aids in setting educational objectives for children experiencing learning difficulties. Observation is more appropriate for young children than standardized testing which has been shown to have severe limitations.[5]

Young children are usually unperturbed by being observed in their natural setting, and observers can be trained in such a way to perform their task unobtrusively using either formal or informal techniques. They may interact with children or watch as spectators. The reliability, validity and usability of observations made through such means can be established during training.[6]

All personnel involved with children must be aware of the many assessment and evaluating techniques. Not one method should be used exclusively. However, the primary emphasis should be given to observations by parents, teachers, and resource personnel.[7]

Assessing development towards becoming a healthy, effective human being is a complex and difficult task. Teachers observe that children grow and change month by month, but when asked to describe this growth in terms of goals or objectives reached, they feel that the sum of the parts does not seem to express the whole. They try to help a child understand himself or herself and find meaning in living and learning. At the same time, they find it difficult to assess the success of the child at these very things.

> Perhaps the most persistent and important principle which emerges from studying human development in the early years is the wholeness of the child and the continuity of the way in which the child learns.
>
> Schmidt, 1984

By the very nature of group living, the child has been conditioned to act in ways which are acceptable to the group, but such behaviour may mask the child's true feelings and understanding. Even when acting freely, the child by this stage may behave in terms of what is expected and not in terms of what he or she would prefer to do. The successful socialization of the child makes the teacher's task of assessment that much more complicated.

Observing children and recording observations should be part of the daily early years program. Teacher-time must be scheduled for ongoing observation, assessment, and record keeping related to student growth and development. Ongoing observation is a necessary prerequisite for evaluation and further programming. Such observation should not be random but should be related to the items to be evaluated. In preschool education, informal observation is the primary evaluation method. At this stage, however, the rate of growth of children is too rapid to allow the setting of specific standards which should be reached by all children, without seriously limiting expectations for the older or rapidly-maturing child or frustrating the younger and slow-maturing child. Once goals and standards are stated and formalized, there is always the danger that the program will confine itself to attempting to reach these goals. Just because five-year-olds are willing to conform and are interested in trying to please adults, they must not be pressured into any intense training in order to reach pre-determined standards by an evaluation date. At the same time, gifted children must not be allowed to become bored with a program that offers little challenge once a pre-determined standard has been reached.

It is suggested that teachers should review the following desired outcomes and make an informal list of those which are reasonable for particular students to accomplish, by the time an assessment is to be made. Teachers should note special outcomes to satisfy individual needs and should not confine themselves to the objectives suggested but should add items of their own and set their own times for determining whether or not these goals are being approximated.

General Outcomes

A good program makes provision for the child to:

- enjoy natural play activities into which have been woven opportunities for talking, exploring, classifying, organizing, and interpreting so that the child can grow in understanding and begin to see relationships;
- gain satisfaction through learning in the enlarging social group;
- begin to think creatively and to develop unique learning patterns;
- experience success through increasingly sustained effort and conscious use of thought processes leading to the development of good work habits.

Interpersonal Outcomes

The child:

- learns to share experiences with adults and other children, and to accept the limits of group experience;

- learns to trust others and is able to enter safely into warm relationships with other human beings;
- increases in ability to solve social problems, to formulate and modify courses of action, and to cooperate by respecting agreed upon ways of doing some things;
- learns both to lead and to follow;
- experiences the necessity of making choices, develops some of the skills needed in group and personal decision making, and realistically accepts the consequences of specific decisions;
- continues to develop a sense of fair play;
- responds increasingly to social reinforcement rather than to concrete rewards;
- recognizes that many people outside the family care about him or her;
- recognizes the necessity to develop language for a variety of situations (e.g., play group, store keeper, doctor, visitors in the home, visiting in other people's home, telephone conversations);
- engages happily in individual, parallel, and cooperative play.

Given these supports, the child should become less distracted by anxiety, more trusting and more able to learn.

Intrapersonal Outcomes

The child:

- develops a positive and realistic self-concept in response to the image of self as reflected by others and from being allowed to grow as an individual;
- discovers areas of competence which bolster his or her feeling of self-worth and being accepted;
- experiences the personal strength and sense of worth which come from growth in knowledge and the ability to reason and solve problems;
- feels confident enough about self and others to risk making mistakes. The child recognizes that everyone makes mistakes and that this is an inevitable and acceptable part of learning and maturing;
- learns to verbalize feelings;
- is fairly confident about making choices;
- becomes increasingly responsible for completing tasks;
- learns to care for self in dressing, eating, bathroom procedures, and tidying;
- sets realistic goals for self, learns to adjust to occasional failure, and reacts reasonably to criticism and correction;
- develops increasing self-control and a realistic acceptance of personal limitations and the short-comings of others; and
- becomes increasingly resourceful about trying things different ways.

Cognitive Outcomes

The child enjoys an increasing ability to use his or her mind and is laying a foundation for the more formal learning of later developmental stages. These academic preliminaries are important but must not be forced. The teacher can include activities which help the child to:

- develop expressive and receptive language skills;
- become more sensitive to sensory stimuli and become responsive to the environment;
- become increasingly capable of making sensory discriminations;
- develop self-direction and independence;
- symbolize ideas;
- develop more mature thinking skills, to include thoughtful questioning and independent problem solving;
- classify and order the phenomena of the world around;
- understand spatial relationships of weight, height, size and shape;
- establish handedness;
- develop the habit of left-to-right eye movements;
- store sensory impressions in the form of images;
- improve in auditory and visual discrimination; and
- grow in ability to listen, to follow directions, to recall main ideas and to react to stories.

Appropriate activities for the various developmental levels can be found in the subject curricula.

IV. IMPROVING OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS

Observation is a skill that has to be learned and practiced. As part of their training practicum, many teachers and resource personnel will have had help in learning how to observe. However, they are not naturally more objective in their observations than other people and must learn to recognize and interpret behaviour and to withhold judgement until all the information has been gathered. Observers must also examine personal biases and be honest with themselves about the type of behaviour which pleases or irritates them. They must also ask themselves whether or not they have been conditioned to think of academic and verbal learning as the most worthwhile learning.

The behaviour of young children is spontaneous, impulsive and emotionally spurred. Their logic is different from that of adults, but it is right for them and should be respected; the transition to adult logic usually occurs in the teen years. From the viewpoint of the adult, children's behaviour often appears changeable and unpredictable. It is, however, an honest expression of their feelings at the time.

Children also express their feelings and thoughts in a physical manner and often react totally in terms of their physical needs. Consequently, observers must avoid judging children's behaviour in terms that imply that the child is unacceptable.

The process by which a child copes with life are important measures of the maturity of that child. The adult concept of childhood as a time of helplessness and as a time when children should be manipulated and controlled, must be set aside if parents and teachers want to see the child become self-directed, self-motivated, and responsible for his or her actions.

Teachers can record their observations in the classroom by jotting down notes or by using videotapes, audio cassettes or movies. Not only do these mechanical means of recording provide permanent records, they can also be used to improve the observer's ability, whether that person is the teacher, a parent or resource personnel.

Having two or more observers review the tapes or movies allows them to compare and discuss both their observations and their interpretations.

Teachers can function as spectator or participant observers. Each process yields a different kind of information.

Regular, systematic observations and skill in using resulting information are tools for assessing, programming and evaluating during the early school years.

> Learning to listen, really to listen to children, and record accurately what it is they say, is a very important attainment.
>
> Elkind, 1976

V. RECORDING OBSERVATIONS

The primary purpose of recording observations is to implement programming based on the child's developmental and learning needs. Consequently, observations must include assessment of all of growth and development and learning. Teachers will need to consider all the information they have been able to gather from careful observations and record-keeping as well as from their consultations with resource personnel.

The child's behaviour may be observed by parents, teachers, resource and support personnel in a variety of settings:

- with adults,
- with another child,
- during language use,
- during routines,
- using materials,

- during teacher directed activities, and
- during child directed activities.

These observations may be recorded in a variety of forms:

- developmental history from birth to the present for registration:
    - birthing conditions
    - specific health information
    - vision and hearing screening
    - gross motor screening
    - interests, hobbies, activities of the child
- for recording classroom observations:
    - photographs
    - videotapes, cassette recordings, movies
    - collections of children's work
    - anecdotal records, diaries, logs
    - activity lists
    - learning centre records
    - time or event sampling
    - checklists and rating scales
    - structured tasks
    - contracts
    - questionnaires
    - criteria-referenced tasks
    - norm-referenced tests
- interviews to share information:
    - with parents
    - with other school personnel
    - with the child

VI. REPORTING TO PARENTS

There is no single "best" way of reporting to parents. The nature of the child, the family, the school, the community, the society and the culture will determine which methods of reporting are most satisfactory to all concerned.

At the same time, however, sensitive and open discussions with parents will help school personnel to share information about the child. Although interviews are time-consuming and difficult to schedule, parents and teachers need the opportunity to talk together and share what they know about each child. In order to make these interviews possible, teachers require release time but may also have to schedule evening appointments.

In discussion with parents, teachers should focus on what the child can do and help them to understand how significant the child's self-concept is to learning. It is the environment and acceptance the child finds both at school and at home which determines the child's self-concept. Thus, the careful observations that have been made are extremely important in these discussions.

In reporting on the progress of the young child, school personnel should resist pressure to assess only the academic. It is necessary to report on all dimensions of the child's development: self-concept, emotional, social, creative, moral, physical as well as intellectual aspects of growth. Moreover, it is of extreme importance that parents be encouraged to become involved in the planning, implementing and evaluating of the child's programs. In this way the school supports the family, as the primary agent of the child's development.

It is important for both parents and teachers to share information about children. Developmental assessment is a continuous process that records the work that children do. During interviews teachers discuss their observations of the child at work (process) and give parents samples of the child's work (product).

The following suggestions for material to be included in children's records were adapted from the Early Childhood Education Department, Toronto Board of Education, 1983:

- silhouette of child on cover of portfolio
- snapshots of child at favourite activities
- September drawings and writings
- June drawings and writings
- names/snapshots of friends
- samples of child's language use
- handprint/footprint of child
- length of string as record of child's height
- record of child's weight from September to June
- books made by child
- child's favourite classroom recipes
- diagram of classroom layout
- classroom diary

FOOTNOTES

[1] Manitoba Education, "Early Childhood Working Paper," Education Manitoba, 18, No. 5 (1986), 10.

[2] B.K. Keogh and L.D. Becker, "Early Detection of Learning Problems: Questions, Cautions and Guidelines," Exceptional Children, 40 (1973), 7.

[3] Susan Bell, "Entry Age and School Success: A Research Review," Early Childhood Education, 14, No. 2 (1981).

[4] Arthur W. Combs, A Personal Approach to Teaching (Toronto: Allyn and Bacon, 1982).

[5] N.L. Goodwin and Laura A. Driscoll, Handbook for Measurement and Evaluation in Early Childhood Education (Washington: Jassey Bass Publishers, 1980).

[6] Doreen Yamashita, Self-Concept and Kindergarten Screening Performance, Published Doctoral Dissertation, Univ. of Northern Colorado, 1983.

[7] Manitoba Education. Early Identification and Education Pilot Project Report (Winnipeg: Manitoba Education, 1983).

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CHAPTER SEVEN

HELPING TEACHERS INTEGRATE CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

I. A COMMITMENT TO INTEGRATION

Many educators feel that children with special needs should be in early years classrooms. Legislation in North America is moving in this direction by making it mandatory to educate children with special needs in the "least restrictive environment." Manitoba's Minister of Education (1983) has identified this form of integration as a desirable goal.

"The stance of the Government of Manitoba with respect to children with special needs is the following:

> "Since each child in the Province has the right to develop to the fullest extent possible as a confident and valued member of our society, there is a responsibility for the provincial government and those who provide educational services in the public school system to ensure that the child with special needs has an equal opportunity to receive a meaningful and appropriate educational program.
>
> "To provide a child with an appropriate program, we believe the child is best placed where her/his total needs are met as completely as possible. For a large proportion of children with special needs, this goal is best accomplished by placement within the regular program stream. Social interaction with other students in a normal environment is a vital part of the educational curriculum. For many of these children, it is necessary to provide additional supports in order for them to benefit fully from their experience in the regular classroom."[1]

This commitment by the provincial government to the integration of special needs students into the main stream has become a vital issue for everyone.

II. DEFINITION AND PRINCIPLES OF INTEGRATION

The question often arises as to what the integration of special needs children means. In the early years, "educational integration of children with special needs means just that--integration. It does not mean segregation, partial segregation or placement in a resource room.

Integration means integration--that is, the inclusion of children with special needs into the 'integral whole' of the school system."[2]

Advocates of special needs children such as the action-oriented group of parents and educators named The Integration-Action Group have developed a statement of principle regarding integration. They believe that all children have the right to a full education and to participation in society--to life in the community. The best way to prepare children for life in the community is through education alongside their peers, typical children from the neighbourhood, in regular classroom settings.

- All children can learn and develop.
- All children need to live at home in a family.
- All children need to share normal educational experiences with others their own age.
- All children need neighborhood friendships and relationships.
- All children need supports and services from time to time, and these should be provided in his or her neighborhood school, in a regular classroom setting.
- All children need an education that will prepare them to live and work in the real world, rather than in artificial, sheltered environments.
- All children need to acquire the daily social and coping skills that develop through life in the community.
- All children need the chance to become 'just one of the kids.'
- Successful integration of children with special needs benefits not only the child, but also his or her friends and peers, the school system and society as a whole.[3]

Integration, however, does not take place by simply putting the child in a regular classroom. There must be a commitment to integration by a team of people in the school.

III. THE SCHOOL TEAM

Although a teacher who skillfully deals with children as individuals will best be able to integrate, the commitment does not lie solely with the teacher. A team approach is necessary. The main goal of this school-based team is one of shared responsibiliites in providing programming to meet needs in order to maximize each child's growth.

The school team may consist of the following.

- parents
- classroom teacher
- teacher aide
- principal
- resource teacher
- support personnel, e.g., clinicians/psychologists/social workers
- community personnel, e.g., consultants/public health nurse

> It is essential that all personnel involved in planning know the child well.

In each school the roles of the team members should be defined locally. A team member can be assigned to co-ordinate program planning meetings and to develop a plan of action. This plan should be based on the specific child's needs, not based on any label the child comes with to school.

IV. A NEEDS-BASED PROGRAM

In a child-centred learning environment, the teacher develops a needs-based program. "This program will attempt to respond:

- to identified needs of any child;
- to identified needs of any classroom teacher, in respect to a child's needs;
- to a request for assistance from any child, teacher, principal, parent, etc.;
- by identifying the specific needs of the child and/or the teacher, in respect to a child's needs;
- by developing an educational prescription (program);
- by regular monitoring, including necessary adjustments or modifications."[4]

> Planning and evaluation are ongoing processes which continue throughout the child's schooling.

V. THE SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD

Children with special needs are children first. They are more like their peers than unlike them and have a right to be educated with them. Emphasis should be placed not on children's limitations but rather on their possibilities. Specific examples of special needs students are outlined below.

Although it is not desirable to categorize children into specific special needs groups, the source book identifies the following broad categories and where appropriate, resources that are available in order to help teachers.

Visual Impairment

Visually impaired children need the concrete experiences which a well-planned early years program provides. They need to feel capable of joining in with almost all activities and to feel accepted by their peers. Sighted children come to accept visually impaired children and discover that they are able to take part in many of the activities that sighted children enjoy.

Generally speaking, visually impaired students fall into three categories: braille users, low vision print users, and multi-handicapped visually impaired.

The consultants for the visually impaired, within the Child Care and Development Branch of Manitoba Education, provide support services to the visually impaired/blind students and their teachers. The amount and type of support services provided are dependent upon the individual needs of the visually impaired student and his or her educational setting.

The service delivery usually involves a number of functions:

- functional vision assessment followed by consultation with the classroom teacher(s);
- provision of alternate format materials such as braille, tape and/or large print;
- specialized educational equipment/aids when deemed appropriate; and
- some direct service instruction in specialized skill areas.

When teachers suspect a student has a visual impairment, they may initiate support services by requesting the appropriate referral from either their divisional special education coordinator or by contacting the Child Care and Development Branch of Manitoba Education. Upon receiving the completed referral form, a consultant for the visually impaired will contact the school to arrange an appointment.

The Child Care and Development Branch shares the belief that all visually impaired children should be provided with the optimum educational environment to maximize their learning. It is the department's intention to assist the school in meeting this objective.

Hearing Impairment

There are numerous causes of hearing loss, but major contributors to such impairments are rubella, prematurity, Rh factor and heredity. Childhood diseases sometimes leave a child with a hearing loss and, if it is not of a significant degree, it may often go undetected. The regular classroom teacher may notice a child having speech problems, having difficulty following directions or straining to hear. A child exhibiting these or any other symptoms indicative of a hearing loss should be referred to the school nurse.

All children should be screened for hearing impairments in the early years of life so that intervention can take place as soon as possible. Once a hearing loss is confirmed through formal testing, the child should be referred to the Manitoba Education Child Care and Development Branch for placement and programming assistance. The regular classroom teacher will receive necessary support from both a consultant for the hearing impaired and a speech/language pathologist.

Children with hearing impairments will usually use amplification devices such as hearing aids or FM auditory trainers. Teachers who are unfamiliar with such devices should receive in-servicing from an audiologist or a consultant for the hearing impaired to ensure the proper use and care of the equipment. The in-service will also involve information about the classroom environment and teaching strategies most suitable to accommodate a hearing impaired child in the mainstream.

Some of the considerations a teacher might have to make for the hearing impaired are:

- special seating arrangements,
- consideration for speech and reading,
- the use of key words on the board to help with instruction,
- the use of a classmate as a "helpmate."

Physical Handicap

There are a number of different conditions that may cause the physical impairment of children. Some of these are: spina bifida, cerebral palsy, seizure disorders, and neurological problems. Each of these may involve varying degrees of handicap. For a more complete description, see the Special Needs Handbook (1985) published by the Manitoba Teachers' Society.

Children with physical handicaps may require specially adapted furniture, equipment and special format materials to participate in a program; others may require little or no special adaptations. Child Care and Development Branch of Manitoba Education has a section, Special Materials Services, in which special needs materials, equipment and special format materials (Braille, audio, tape, large print) are available.

Developmental "Delay"

Children who are developmentally "delayed" can often be readily integrated into an early years program. It is important to spend a considerable length of time observing the child in order to appreciate the child's developmental needs. To assess what these needs are, a teacher must have a comprehensive knowledge of child development. This teacher will best be able to adapt the environment in order to foster growth, development and learning in the child.

A child's rate of learning may be affected by a number of factors: emotional, environmental, psychological or physical. For example, some children may be physically handicapped to a degree that impairs their ability to interact with their environment, and thus, the development of their hearing may be slowed or delayed. There are also a number of medical conditions whose presence in the young child may cause slower patterns of learning. The child's potential may not be decreased, but his or her growth may be delayed. Similarly, this might hold true for emotional, environmental or psychological factors.

It is particularly important when working with each child to keep an open mind about future growth, development and learning. The young child needs to be given time to grow, to develop and to learn. Labels applied at this early age can be damaging and misleading.

Emotional Problems

Many children with emotional problems may function very well in a regular early years classroom; others may require some additional special services or programming before they are able to relate to their peers. A careful study of the disturbed child's problems needs to be made by the school team. With school team support to the teacher such as professional help from psychologists, classroom assistance in the form of an aide or lowered enrollment, it may be that the free play, the physical activity and generally happy and productive atmosphere of an early years program may have a positive effect on the behaviour of an emotionally disturbed child.

Child Abuse

All children have a moral claim on adults for the fulfillment of their physical and emotional needs and protection from harm and exploitation. Unfortunately, there are numbers of children in our communities whose rights in these regards are violated. Teachers may encounter children who are in need of protection on account of abuse or inadequate care, supervision or control.

"Child abuse" means acts or omissions by a parent, guardian or other person in whose care the child is, which results in harm to the child. It includes physical beatings or assaults, sexual abuse (i.e., the exploitation of the child for the personal sexual gratification of a parent, guardian or other adult from outside the family; sexual molestation, sexual assault and child pornography, as well as incest) and the infliction of emotional abuse such that the child is likely to suffer emotional disability of a permanent nature.

In Manitoba, any person who has information about such situations is legally bound to report them to the proper authorities: the police, a child caring agency or a recognized medical child abuse unit. Persons who report information concerning a child in need of protection are not liable to legal action even if their report is mistaken. Their names are also kept confidential.

Teachers should be alert to indicators of possible abuse such as:

- physical marks such as welts, burns, bruises, scars, and fractures;
- behaviour one would expect of a younger child such as thumbsucking, temper tantrums, loss of bladder control, fearfulness, and clinging to an adult for emotional support;
- dirty or torn clothing and an unpleasant body odor or other signs of a lack of basic health care such as the failure to provide dental work, glasses, or immunization;
- tiredness and listlessness, the result of not getting enough sleep and good food;
- low self-esteem; problems with learning and communicating;
- destructiveness, hyperactivity, or aggressiveness (children who are bullied at home may vent their hostility by bullying other children. Their relationship with adults may also be poor.);

- passiveness or over-compliance, day dreaming or inattention (some abused children will daydream or be inattentive while others will show no signs of pain or emotion);
- late arrival at school or absences without valid reasons, reluctance to go home after school.

Indicators such as these may also be judged in the light of what is known about the child's parents or care-givers. Abusive parents often blame the child for being injured. They may constantly criticize the child and never mention good qualities. They may be indifferent to the child's feelings and seldom touch him or her in an affectionate manner. They may overlook the child's achievements and abilities and constantly "put the child down." If a teacher is unsure whether or not to report a given situation, she or he should consult with the local child caring agency. It is always better to err in favour of the child's safety and protection.

Gifted and Talented

Gifted and talented children are those who have outstanding abilities and talents. If they are to develop their potential, they require differentiated learning experiences to meet their educational needs. Research has shown that these children do not grow toward their potential without some special assistance. Instead, they often become bored and dissatisfied with school.

Gifted and talented children may not be gifted in all areas. However, they may exhibit one or a combination of the following characteristics:

- general academic ability,
- academic ability in a specific area,
- creative or productive thinking,
- leadership ability,
- ability in the visual or performing arts,
- psychomotor ability.

In order to develop appropriate programming for these students, a school team approach works best. The teacher is then not alone in the total planning. Supports are there to develop open-ended, flexible programming which will allow the child to question, explore, analyze, synthesize, draw conclusions and evaluate.

Parental Involvement

All children learn best when the home and school share in their educational experience. The scope of parental involvement ranges from assisting in the classroom to developing services such as baby-sitting or equipment exchanges, to just plain questioning. Through involvement, the parent gains a better understanding of the child's learning behaviour, as well as a chance to share experiences with other parents and staff. The school, on the other hand, is able to establish a link between the home and itself and gain insight and knowledge about the child's needs. Effective parental involvement enhances the effectiveness of the school. (Also see Chapter 8: The Parent Connection).

FOOTNOTES

[1] A position paper sent to superintendents, secretary-treasurers and special education coordinators clarifying the Minister of Education's stance regarding provincial expectations with respect to the application of special needs supports. Sent by Honourable Maureen Hemphill, May 18, 1983.

[2] Marsha Forest, "Education Update: The Wellington County Separate School Board at Work," Education/Integration (Downsview, ON: National Institution on Mental Retardation, n.d.) Rprt. from Canadian Journal on Mental Retardation, Summer 1984, pp. 71-75.

[3] National Institute on Mental Retardation, Education/Integration (Downsview, ON: The Institute, n.d.), p. 83.

[4] Forest, p. 72.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PARENT CONNECTION

Before a child comes to school, parents are the most influential teachers. Once the child comes to school, another adult assumes some of the responsibility for that child's well-being. Both the home and the school environments will now determine the direction of development. It is neither desirable nor possible to divide the areas of responsibility. The teacher may feel that the major concern is to foster intellectual growth but is well aware that he or she is teaching the whole child who has emotional, social and physical needs which must be met. The parents may feel inclined to leave the responsibility for intellectual growth with the teacher, but are becoming increasingly aware of the important part they can play in stimulating a child's thinking and in creating a healthy attitude toward learning. Many parents are actively seeking help in providing the environment their growing child needs, because they know that research has shown that the early years are critical in setting the pattern for future growth. They

know that the skills a young child develops in social relations, the methods he or she adopts in dealing with frustrations and disappointments, the degree of permissiveness experienced in the home and how the child feels about him- or herself, have a bearing on whether or not that child will be a happy and productive person.

Therefore, teachers should be sensitive to sharing responsibility for the children's development with parents by providing an environment where the parents' and children's cultural backgrounds, value systems, attitudes and goals are shared and respected. When involving parents in the school, educators must be aware of the pitfall of assuming that the parent, especially from a low socio-economic or culturally different background, is doing an inadequate job.

I. HELPING PARENTS UNDERSTAND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Much of the learning which takes place in school comes through the medium of language. Children who come to school able to express themselves fluently and precisely in the language of instruction have a distinct advantage over those whose language skills are immature. In school children have to listen to and interpret instructions; they must be able to frame their own questions and express their ideas confidently; they have to learn to organize their thoughts and comprehend what others say to them. How well they can do this in the early stages depends on the richness of the language experience they have had in their preschool years. In summation, for language skills to develop well, children must:

- hear language from birth so that they learn to speak by imitation;
- be talked to directly and have their own faltering attempts to express themselves listened to and appreciated;
- be exposed to and encouraged to use an increasingly larger vocabulary, more complex forms of expression, and correct grammatical structures;
- be challenged to organize their thoughts;
- learn to listen carefully.

Suggestions for Language Activities

1. Talk to children even when they are unable to understand what is being said, because hearing language creates the sub-vocal language needed for speech. The child will begin to distinguish certain words which are important to him or her; e.g., bottle, mum, car, bath, etc.

2. Repeat each word that the child begins to use and show pleasure in this growing skill.

3. Interpret the fragmentary sentences that children use and express these back to them, e.g., "Me want go" may be repeated as "You want to go in the car, too?" "I happy," may be returned as "Good! I am happy too." Sometimes a child's simple "No" may require a sentence such as, "Don't you want to have your bath now?" Accept patiently the limited language the child uses and remember that

each child is going through the experience of learning a foreign language. Try to understand the mistakes that the child makes; they may be very reasonable. A child who calls the first earthworm he or she sees, a "baby snake" has certainly abstracted some of the snake characteristics from the snakes or pictures of snakes which have been seen. "Cup-plate" is an intelligent description of a saucer and "holiday-truck" does describe some campers.

4. Tell stories and read to children as much as is possible. Discuss the stories and encourage the child to join in reciting some of the exciting parts, e.g., "The great grey, green, greasy Limpopo River, all girt gut about with fever trees!"

5. Give children ample opportunities to speak and be listened to. It is easier to "put the words into their mouths," but give them the chance to organize and express themselves and to answer questions directed to them. When someone asks a child's name, age, or address, give the child a chance to answer.

6. Enrich the child's vocabulary to distinguish between such "look-alikes" as horses and cattle. Later it may be possible to recognize a Holstein, a Hereford, or an Angus. Encourage the use of words like colt, fawn, calf, etc., instead of just using the diminutive, "baby." Becoming aware of clues to distinguish the makes of cars and names of service stations fosters the development of classification and observation skills, both of which are prereading skills.

7. Eliminate "talking down" to children as soon as possible. Children who constantly hear mature forms of speech learn to reproduce them.

8. Buy books for the very young and encourage them to talk about pictures. These pictures may lend themselves to telling a story in sequence in which the children supply their own words.

9. Create games in which children must follow verbal instructions. Begin by having the children carry out one instruction at a time, gradually increasing the number of instructions in the series. "Go to the button box and find a button with two holes in it. Bring it to me and put it in my apron pocket." Children should have a turn at giving directions too.

10. Encourage children to anticipate outcomes in stories and to express what is likely.

11. If there is reason to believe that the child has a speech problem, seek help early. If the problem stems from a real malfunction of speech organs, medical help may be needed. However, do not become overanxious if a child has difficulty making a few sounds; this is normal in a preschooler and will likely disappear before school age. Some consonants require the use of small tongue muscles which may not be developed until a child is six or seven years old.

A rich home environment that encourages language growth and lively discussion will enhance a child's natural interest in exploring the world and expressing feelings and opinions. It is not expected that children should be taught to read before they come to school, but if books are built into the environment, children will establish the life-long habit of looking to books for information and pleasure.

> Since the main influence on a child's language lies outside of school, parents and society must share the responsibility for the quality of language children learn.

II. HOME AND SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Once the child enters the school system, education becomes a joint responsibility. A lifelong process, education does not stop and start during school hours. In fact, research shows that parental involvement can increase a student's academic achievement in school. Therefore, communication with parents becomes of paramount importance. This communication can take place in a wide variety of forms.

Meet the Teacher

It is advisable to plan two evening meetings so that parents will have a reasonable chance to attend. Publicity should positively stress the importance of these meetings and encourage attendance. In addition, parents should be advised that these meetings are not interviews to discuss individual children but are general information sessions.

Among the displays set up around the classroom, could be:

- articles, books, magazines which support the classroom philosophy for children such as:
  - books on parenting, home-crafts for children,
  - magazines and book subscriptions suitable for five- to nine-year-olds,
  - information on available community facilities for new residents - clinics, parks, library, playgrounds,
  - professional literature on educational topics;

- a snack table featuring nutritious food such as fruit juice, nuts/raisins, cheese, biscuits, fruits, vegetable sticks;
- centres with a chart at each explaining the values to the child of block play, water play, sand play, house centre, large muscle centre, listening, viewing, reading corners, painting, construction area, modelling, drawing and printing areas;
- children's painting, stories, and construction items.

The program could include:

- introductory remarks by the principal;
- introductory remarks by the teacher that provide some personal background and a five- to ten-minute statement of philosophy;
- short film, video or filmstrip (to one-half hour) on pertinent topics for parents of five- to nine-year-olds. Topics could include parenting, language development, value of play;
- five- to ten-minute statement of goals and routines for the year, as the teacher sees it;
- brief suggestions on how parents can help support the school program;
- snack break;
- questions and discussions.

At the conclusion of the program, a resource sheet can be given out on which parents indicate their occupations, what contacts they have which could be helpful to the teacher in planning specific outings or finding materials for the classroom, and any specific skills they have which they are willing to share with an early years class. At this point, the teacher can solicit volunteers for the program.

Diary

- a daily diary kept to share with parents
- children's notes on day's activities
- diaries can include
  - calendar
  - poems and stories read
  - daily entries by children
  - best work of the month

Kindergram

- a monthly note sent home by the teacher summarizing the month's activities

Parent Visitation

- an "open house" during the day so parents can see and experience what is happening in the classroom

Informal Contacts

- meeting after school
- samples of child's work sent home with comments
- notes sent home
- telephone calls

Student Achievement Forms

- forms sent two to three times per week (see sample forms at the end of the chapter)

Letters to Parents

- Sample letters at the end of the chapter

Activity Calendar

- a calendar of activities for the parents to do with their child at home (The activity calendar, a very colourful 92 x 62 cm poster, suggests an activity for each day of the year. It is available from the Manitoba Text Book Bureau in English, French, German and Ukrainian.)

Conferences*

The days of the traditional report card appear to be numbered. More and more schools are finding that the parent-teacher conference is the best way to tell parents about their child's progress in school. While a parent-teacher conference can be a positive force for improved school-community communications and understanding, it also has the potential for some of the worst education public relations imaginable.

Before the Conference

- Make sure you know the student. Know the child by name, not just the desk he occupies.
- Prepare a check list. Include such things as work habits, day-to-day performance related to the child's capabilities and social and emotional adjustment.
- Establish a friendly setting. Get out from behind your desk. The interview should be conducted in a comfortable, informal atmosphere. Remember, a presentable classroom will help to set a good tone.
- Schedule your conference. Arrange times so that you can have a few minutes between conferences to make notes on the previous conference and prepare for the next one. Firmly, but politely, stick to your timetable.

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*The following information is reprinted from a brochure entitled, Parent-Teacher Conferences: A Guide for Teachers, produced and published by the Manitoba Teachers' Society. Used with permission.

- Be prepared to explain the school's program and evaluation procedures. Parents have a right to know what you are doing with their child. Know about school purposes, methods and evaluation procedures.
- Prepare examples of the student's work. When you report on a student's weaknesses or strengths, have specific examples to show parents.

During the Conference

- Begin with a positive remark. A favourable comment, before launching into discussion of the child's problems, sets a good tone for the conference. End with a positive comment, too.
- Use examples when explaining. Use definite examples of the student's work when explaining any strength, weakness or means of improvement. Definite examples of student's behaviour should also be used to explain his level of maturity and personal adjustment.
- Explain standards. Be explicit when telling how you have determined a student's capabilities. Explain purposes and limitations of achievement and intelligence tests.
- Avoid jargon. Use every day language. Professional and psychological terms such as overachiever, cognitive, regression and the like are inappropriate.
- Don't predict. You may be wrong when you express an opinion on a child's future achievement. Your discussion about a student should be based on the current school year.
- Suggest possible techniques to use. Telling a parent what to do easily arouses resentment. A better technique is to explain some procedures that have worked in other cases. These can then be discussed in terms of whether they will work for this particular student or not.
- No one wins an argument. If parents refuse to acknowledge that their child has a difficulty, it is useless to attempt a solution. Further illustrations of the student's poor behaviour or academic performance from you or other teachers may result in the parents' admitting that there is a problem. Then, solutions can be developed.
- Be prepared to limit discussion. Be selective when dealing with a student's difficulty. It is better to focus on one problem in depth than to give a superficial treatment to many.
- Politely refuse to discuss certain matters. If parents keep referring to a specific problem, it is likely a real concern with them. Allow time for it, even if it seems insignificant. However, avoid topics which confuse, mislead or cause you to be unprofessional: psychological interpretations; placing blame for a student's problem on the "other" parent's behaviour; specific test scores and ratings; and, other teachers of children. In any case, everything that is said during the conference should be held in confidence.
- Let parents ask questions. Parents will likely have something on their agenda to discuss with you. Inquire directly, "Is there anything you want to discuss?"
- Take stock when the interview concludes. Summarize parents' ideas and your suggestions. Reaffirm the ways you both can follow through.

- The next conference. Thank parents for attending the conference. Make sure that it is clear who will call the next conference--you, the parents, or both you and the parents.

After the Conference

- Record points covered.
- List the conclusions reached--including how the next conference will come about.
- Note your personal impression of the conference.
- Jot down any information which may help you to teach the student more successfully.
- Make sure you carry out your part of any follow through.

Those "Other" Conferences--A Check List

Often a parent-teacher conference has to be hastily called, by teacher or parent, to deal with a problem. Here is a quick check list for these conferences. Remember that all the guidelines for the reporting conference also apply.

- Try to learn the nature of the problem, if possible.
- Prepare as carefully as possible; be informed about school methods, purposes, etc.
- Insure privacy and confidentiality.
- Be professional; keep to the topic.
- Make sure that you and the parents clearly understand the problem.
- Develop an attitude of cooperation. Do not argue.
- Delay making definite suggestions yourself; encourage the parents to offer their suggestions.
- Make plans together for future progress.
- End on a positive note.

Parental Involvement in the School

Use your parents! This may be the best means of developing a closer liaison between the home and school. However, parents should be able to choose the type and level of involvement with which they feel comfortable.

Parents can be involved as:

- policy makers, members of parent/teacher committees;
- resource people
  - fund raisers
  - volunteers (doing non-teaching tasks, providing adult models, observing, bringing special skills, doing library clerical work, decreasing adult/child ratio)
- participants in parent education programs.

Parenting programs are an excellent way to get parents involved with school. They are optional, of course; the parent may choose to attend. Also, parent involvement in the planning of content and time is most important.

Volunteer aid programs get parents and other members of the community working in the formal education setting. Volunteers require an ongoing training program because they must understand and respect the early years philosophy and learning theory. Instruction can be informal and on a day-to-day basis in the classroom, but some large group sessions are advised. Volunteers can interpret the school program to people in the community.

Aides, volunteers, or cross-age helpers are especially useful during learning centre activities. They can provide materials, encourage children, foster growth in social skills, and help children learn to be tidy. These helpers should show concern for each child's well-being and rely on the teacher for direction and guidance.

Often helpers have a tendency to show little children how to do things and to do things for them. However, young children need encouragement to try doing things for themselves and need the assurance that they can learn. Children feel comfortable when they know that there is an adult available to share their excitement in accomplishment and to help them when necessary.

Educate children to become independent. This cannot be accomplished by doing for them what they can do for themselves.

III. THE PARENT AND TELEVISION

Many researchers view television as an enemy of learning. Television has a strong impact on the child, influencing how he or she dresses, talks, acts and even what he or she eats. Children need to learn how to control television and not be controlled by it.

Children learn by participating in activities. While watching television, children are not engaging in real life experiences such as helping their parents, playing, making collections, or doing art or craft activities. Television is a passive medium.

In his book, The Read-Aloud Handbook, Jim Trelease feels that, compared to reading a book, television is sadly lacking.[1] A book is written to hold attention, while the reader moves at his or her own pace. Television, on the other hand, controls the pace and leaves no time to ponder. For young children, a book is a social vehicle because someone else must read it, and there is time for discussion. Television tends to be anti-social as conversations are usually discouraged during T.V. watching. Television cannot portray a character's thoughts, whereas a book can delve into what the character is thinking. In fact, television teaches children that thinking is not necessary because all problems can be solved by artificial means as suggested by the commercials. While books allow the child to use his or her imagination during reading, television provides all the visuals which can stifle the child's imagination. As well, research shows that children tend to imitate violent behaviour viewed on television. The reading of books, on the other hand, sensitizes children against violence. What can parents do? Take a strong stand! Limit television watching! Provide alternatives for your children. Make sure they have plenty of paper, crayons, books. Allow them to participate with you, helping with cooking, doing chores and playing games.

Newspapers, blank paper, junk mail, cardboard boxes, crayons, paints, provide the best opportunities for creativity. Avoid colouring books!

Remember, children learn through play in exploring, experimenting and understanding the world about them. They learn through interaction with adults by questioning, telling, sharing ideas and using their language. They also learn by observing, imitating and practicing others' actions.

PLAY TODAY

You say you love your children
And are concerned they learn today?
So am I - that's why I'm providing
A variety of kinds of play.

You're asking me the value
Of blocks and other such play?
Your children are solving problems
They will use that skill everyday.

You're asking what's the value
Of having your children play?
Your daughter's creating a tower
She may be a builder someday.

You're saying you don't want your son
To play in that "sissy" way
He's learning to cuddle a doll
He may be a father someday.

You're questioning the interest centres
They just look like useless play?
Your children are making choices
They'll be on their own way someday.

You're worried your children aren't learning
And later they'll have to pay?
They're learning a pattern for learning
For they'll be learning always.

- Author Unknown

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FORM (Example 1)

Student: Bretta Bass Grade: 1

Teacher: M. Besant

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	Cooperates with others Respects self and others Takes responsibility Works independently Shows initiative Shows creativity	Bretta works well in a small group. She shares both her materials and her ideas, of which she has an abundance. For example, she initiated a magic show with three other students. She shared the games she brought from home, and together, the four of them presented a show to the class.
COMMUNICATIONS	LANGUAGE ARTS Listening Speaking Writing Reading Handwriting	When others are talking, Bretta is a good listener. She also expresses herself orally in a clear manner. Although she is not reading books, she is beginning to write, using her own form of spelling, and can identify most of the signs and symbols around the room.
	MATHEMATICS Arithmetic Measurement Geometry Problem-Solving	She is developing a good understanding of measurement using non-standard objects--identifying objects as "bigger than or smaller than," etc. She is learning her number facts to ten using a variety of concrete objects. Her oral problem skills are good.
THE ARTS	MUSIC	Bretta loves to sing. Because of her good listening skills she is able to pick out rhythms and respond to changing tempos.
	VISUAL ARTS	She draws very expressively. She loves to tell stories about what she has done.
	PHYSICAL EDUCATION	During gym time Bretta appears unsure of herself. She is very hesitant to participate in any of the physical activities.
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES	SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES, SCIENCE, HEALTH - knowledge - thinking and research skills - attitudes and values	
	Orally, she exhibits her understanding of Social Studies, Science and Health. We have been studying about ourselves and our physical needs. She was able to express the differences between what she felt were needs and wants. She is developing a very positive self-concept and appears very accepting towards others. Bretta's enthusiasm is a positive force in the class.	

Date Sent ____ Days Absent ____ Placement ____

Teacher ____ Principal ____

Signature Parent/Guardian ____

SAMPLE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FORM (Example 2)

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

What responsibilities does your child assume?
In what circumstances is it easy for your child to cooperate and participate?
When is it easy for your child to share with others?
How does your child respond in a new situation?

COMMUNICATIONS

Language Arts - Mathematics

How well does your child listen?
What degree of interest does your child show in reading?
What words does your child recognize?
What questions does your child ask?
What do you notice when your child reads?
What do you notice when your child expresses his or her ideas on paper?
What interest does your child show in mathematical activities?

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

Social and Environmental Studies - Science - Health

How does your child satisfy his or her curiosity?
The teacher looks for evidence of

- sharing observations,
- applying observations to new situations,
- comparing and contrasting,
- collecting data from print,
- recording information in a systematic way.

THE ARTS

Music - Art - Physical Education

Does your child enjoy participating in musical activities?
The teacher looks for evidence of an awareness of pitch, tempo, volume, mood and the use of musical vocabulary.
Does your child enjoy art?
The teacher looks for evidence of logical relationships and the use of symbols.
Does your child enjoy physical activity?
The teacher looks for evidence of body control and spatial awareness.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT FORM

Student: ____________________

Grade - Room: ________________

Teacher: ____________________

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Ryan participates enthusiastically in all group activities. He takes a leadership role in all group projects and activities. He is beginning to accept the ideas of others.

COMMUNICATIONS--LANGUAGE ARTS, MATHEMATICS: Ryan is an eager participant in all discussions. He expresses his ideas in a well-organized manner and is learning to listen to the ideas of others. Ryan is interested in expressing his ideas on paper and uses innovative spellings. He can read back all he writes and can read simple books well. Ryan participates well in all Math activities and can identify groups of objects by number without counting each member.

THE ARTS--MUSIC, ART AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION: Ryan enjoys participating in musical activities, especially those involving movement. He is becoming more aware of his body and how to control his movements. Ryan spends as much time as possible experimenting with various art materials.

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES--SOCIAL STUDIES, SCIENCE, HEALTH: Ryan observes carefully and uses his observations to aid his thought processes. He can record his ideas in picture and simple written form. Ryan has participated well in all activities and has shared his resources on nutrition.

GENERAL COMMENT: Ryan is an eager student. He puts forth good effort and has made fine progress this term. We enjoy him in class!

____

Teacher's Signature

PARENTAL COMMENT:

____

Parent Signature

READING WITH YOUR CHILD

Dear Parents,

You can help your child learn to read at home.

- Read to your child daily.
- Read only stories that you are enthusiastic about yourself!
- Use lots of expression when reading.
- Vary the length and type of book.
- Read above the child's intellectual level occasionally.
- Allow questioning during the story and answer patiently because this promotes curiosity.
- Allow time after the story reading for discussion.
- Make sure your child can see the pages.
- Read about the author; let your child know books are written by people.
- Active children may need to colour while listening.
- Set a good example; read and share your reading.
- Take books to appointments to read to your child while waiting.

Above all, make reading fun!

Sincerely,

Teacher

ENCOURAGING WRITING

Dear Parent,

Your child is beginning to write. You can help in this process.

Before writing, a child needs a topic or idea. The child prewrites by drawing a picture, talking, thinking, listening and free writing. You can help by showing your child the jottings or lists you might make before writing a letter or note.

Sometimes the child writes and then reads the story aloud. The story isn't clear to the audience. Questions are asked, and the story is revised by crossing out, adding words, rearranging sentences. You can help by showing your child any changes you make when writing a letter or note. This will help the child feel more comfortable about crossing out or adding.

After a story is written, sometimes we have a conference. We start on a positive note by confirming what we liked best about the story and questioning what is unclear or could be changed. You can help by reading aloud any letter or note you are writing and ask for help from your child.

When the children publish their stories, they put them in their best form. This requires editing. You can help by allowing the child to complete a story or piece of writing at home before correcting spelling or sentences. A young child may only like minimum editing. Make changes only necessary for the writing to be understood by others.

Sincerely,

Teacher

MATHEMATICS AT HOME

Dear Parent,

Mathematical processes take place daily in the home. By providing your child with opportunities to participate in some of the following activities you can increase his or her mathematical knowledge.

Measuring

- Have your child measure household items, using rulers, scales, measuring cups, etc.
- Give your child different sized containers to use in the bathtub in order to measure volume.
- Have your child measure with different units. Using a toy car, he or she might measure how many car lengths the room is, etc.
- Have your child help in baking by measuring the ingredients.
- Keep a chart of your child's height and weight that shows growth over time. Use metric measure.

Games

- Card games provide many mathematical processes (even dividing cards into equal sets when dealing, shows division).
- Matching games require memory skills.
- Board games help with sums of dice, counting moves, planning strategies.

Money

- Have your child make his or her own purchases. Ask about the amount of change received.
- Give your child allowance and have him or her budget for purchases.

Calculator

- Have your child count by 2's, 5's, 10's, etc.
- Begin adding and subtracting activities.

Household Chores

- Allow your child to sort laundry into size, type, colour, as this activity helps in classification.
- Have your child set the table as this helps in patterning, symmetry and matching.

Sincerely,

Teacher

FOOTNOTES

[1] Jim Trelease, The Read-Aloud Handbook. (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), p. 96 ff.

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